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Welcome

Learn about
Chester Ocampo's
amazing art
on page 8

WELCOME TO FANTASY ARTIST

If you'd like to improve your fantasy art, you can always trust Fantasy Artist to help, and this issue is no exception. This time around we're all about upping the ante in the battle for better fantasy and sci-fi-inspired artwork.

To start off with, there's something for everyone in our feature (p28) – it's packed with a wealth of tips from some of the finest in the fantasy business, so no matter what you create you'll find something to help you make it even better in these pages.

Elsewhere in the mag you'll find tutorials on everything from creature design to comic art, fairytales to facial expressions, and everything else in between. Our tips and techniques will help you to achieve the best art that you possibly can. And once you have, why not head over to our website at www.digitalartistdaily.com and

show your artwork off to the world? You could even end up in the mag yourself...



April

Get in touch with the team



@FantasyArtMag



DigitalArtistUK



fantasyartist@imagine-publishing.co.uk

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chance to see your work in the magazine

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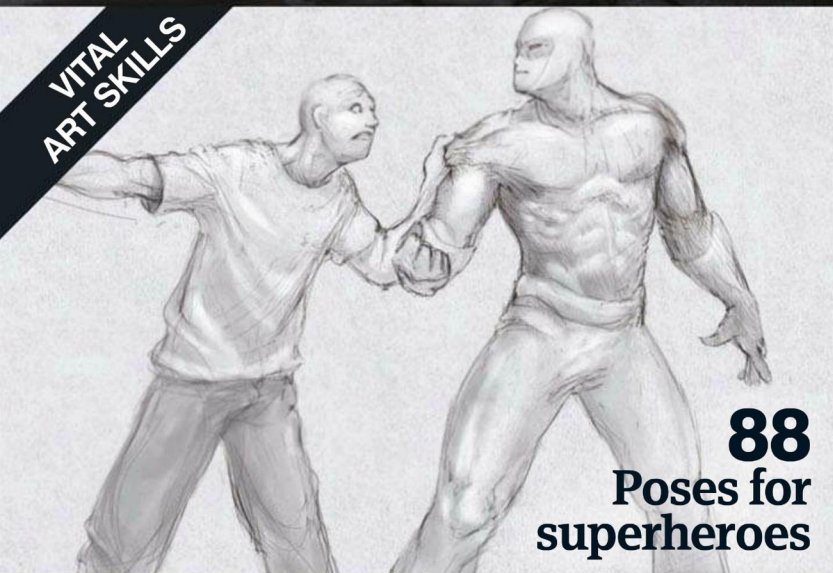


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Learn how concept artist Zhonglu Zhao created our beautiful cover image this issue in his tutorial about designing the character on p36.

Carlos Valenzuela

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Go retro with this pulp-themed tutorial from Carlos on p40. Discover how to get a classic Fifties sci-fi look using some of Photoshop's tools.

Eric Proctor

www.tsaoshin.com



Take flight with Eric's tutorial on how to paint a skyborne dragon. Learn how to flesh out its anatomy with tone and colour starting on p46.

Matt Olson

tinyurl.com/FA-MattO



Jump into comic-book action with this tutorial from Matt Olson on how to draw, ink and colour an action-packed duel on p50.

Lili Ibrahim

www.liliibrahim.com



Draw and paint a creature of the night in a pin-up style with Lili Ibrahim. Learn how to manage colour, tone and shape on p56.

Simon Eckert

holysquid.de



Learn how you can design and paint concept art of a beautiful videogames heroine with Simon Eckert in his tutorial starting on p62.

The artists

Meet this issue's collection of experts

Jonatan Iversen-Ejve

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Discover how you can add a range of personalities to dwarf characters using anatomy, pose, accessories and more on p68.

Jukka Rajaniemi

www.jukka-art.com



Learn how lighting and opacity can create a beautiful fairytale mood in your illustrations with this quick-fix guide to lighting on p74.

Rob Duenas

www.sketchcraft.com



Liven up your digital art with some ink-style textures. Learn how to create a fantastic comic-book look in Rob's guide over on p76.

Brent Hollowell

tinyurl.com/FA-Brent



Be inspired by nature to create a monster design that's subtly scary and learn how colour can affect the mood of your piece, all on p78.

Schin Loong

www.schin-art.com



Add personality to your manga illustrations by exploring how to draw some of the common facial expressions on p80.

John Malcolm

johnmalcolm1970.co.uk



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Edward 'Joel' Wittlif

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Get the lowdown on the basic types of droids found in sci-fi art and learn how you can represent their different functions visually on p84.

Suzanne Helmigh

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Combine elements of human and animal to create an anthro character, then bring it to life with some magical tricks in this guide on p86.

Giuseppe di Girolamo

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Explore the scale and anatomical tricks that will help you to create perfectly posed superheroes. Learn how you can sketch them on p90.

Fantasy Artist

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An interview with Chester Ocampo

From advertising to games to
freelance illustration, we learn
more about his career and process

CHESTER
OCAMPO

Artist info



chesterocampo.net

A freelance illustrator
based in Manila,
Chester's art comprises
of print illustrations,
concept art and art
direction for videogames.

“The countless hours of
pure work and practice aren't
something any school can give”



Last issue our cover star was a beautiful warrior girl created by Filipino illustrator Chester Ocampo. We caught up with one of fantasy and sci-fi's rising stars to talk about his influences and inspiration, career so far and what it was like to work with the legendary Stanley Lau at Imaginary Friends Studios in Singapore.

Where are you from? Tell us about yourself and your art background...

I'm Chester Ocampo, a freelance illustrator based in Manila, Philippines. Born and raised here in this tropical country a few degrees above the equator. I took up advertising management as my major in De La Salle University. Despite this business course, I've been drawing ever since I can remember.

When did you first start creating artwork and do you remember what it was of?

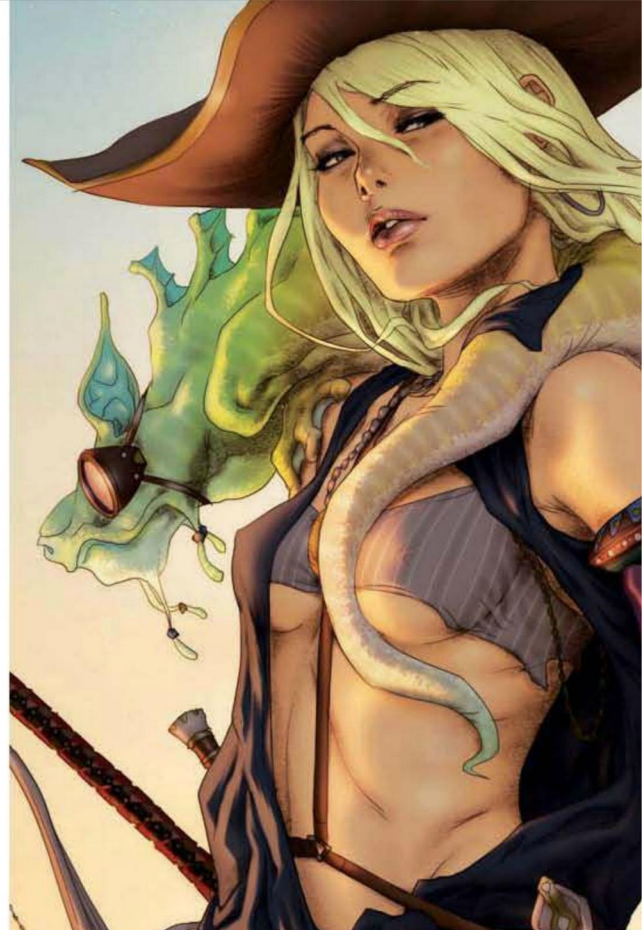
As a child, outside of the regular crayon drawings from pre-school, I drew characters and comics based on TV shows and cartoons that I watched when I was young. I drew a bunch of comics, casting Snoopy (from the comic strip *Peanuts*) in different roles – like Spider-Snoopy or Robo-Snoopy. Nowadays, it's what the kids call mashups or fan fiction. This was all back in the Eighties when there was no internet and we took entertainment where we could get it.

After you majored in advertising management, when and why did you decide to make a career out of art instead?

Six months out of college, I was having a tough time getting into the advertising industry. And with my business degree, most of the agencies were thinking of giving me an account executive job instead of a creative one. After weighing my options and simulating the kind of future I'd have with that job (all in my head, of course), I decided to pursue my lifelong passion instead and try to make a career out of it. I applied to a mobile content development company (mostly IT, with a few graphics services) and got hired right away. My original plan was to make use of that business degree – four years of study and some expensive tuition fees – with art as a plan B, in case I didn't make it into the advertising industry. Guess we know which plan worked!

Did you face any barriers to that, or was there anything you or your family were cautious about when you were first considering a career as an artist? How did you overcome that?

My family, particularly my mum, hoped that I'd be working for a multi-national advertising agency and making use of my college degree somehow. The stable paycheck and routine of a nine-to-five job would give her peace of mind, she said. So, as a compromise, I have worked with several different companies that have steady paychecks, medical benefits, the works – all so that she wouldn't be too worried about my chosen profession. It wasn't until three years ago that I decided to go freelance on a full-time basis, hoping that the past six years of company work would ease her into this bold new



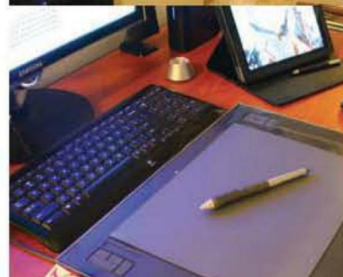
career move. Needless to say, she was not thrilled. It's only recently that she's coming to terms with my business, having proven that I can handle it all these years. It took almost a decade and a handful of big breaks, but she's coming around.

How would you describe your style? What do you think makes a viewer look at an artwork of yours and say "Oooh, that's by Chester Ocampo!"?

My style is a mix of manga and American comics. I'd like to think I took the things I like from both styles and distilled them through my mind into my own unique pieces. Being a freelancer who works with several different clients, preferences and genres, the styles I apply to each work are varied, but the one thing they all have in common is the way I draw my faces. The settings, character design and general aesthetics of my work may vary depending on the client, but the faces, I think, are distinctly drawn in my personal style.

What fascinates you about illustrating female characters and the female form?

I'm very partial to flowing compositions, where the viewer's eye moves smoothly across the image. The soft curves of female characters' faces and anatomy generally lend themselves well to this. Also, there's the added bonus of drawing a pretty face – I spend quite a bit of time drawing faces, so it might as well be something I enjoy looking at. And I think, but don't quote me on this one, that viewers of an image naturally gravitate towards faces. Being humans, it's instinctive for us to focus on a face in an image. Why not a pretty face, so long as we're looking? Not to say that I don't draw dudes too; drawing gruff, muscular guys is what I usually do in a lot of projects. I don't draw that many girls, really!



• The studio Chester shares studio space with the motion graphics company Acid House

• The Mind's Garden (below), 2009 Created for the Wacom contest Bring Your Visions to Life



“It’s instinctive for us to focus on a face... [so] why not a pretty face?”



● **To Starboard (above), 2012** One of Chester’s most recent illustrations, this pirate girl was created with Photoshop and his Wacom Intuos3 tablet

● **Infinity - Citizens (left), 2012** A commissioned piece for the rule book for *Infinity: Human Sphere*, the sci-fi miniatures game from Corvus Belli © Corvus Belli S.L.L.



● **Mariposa Slays Pugita, 2008** Pin-up for *Sword and Sorcery Illustrated*, the best-selling men’s magazine catering to the demographic of males aged between 18 and 300





● **The Gods of Harvest (above), 2008** "The seed is carried by the wind, which, nested safely in earth, is nourished with water...awaiting the harvest"

● **Midnight Monarchs (above right), 2007** In the aftermath of the seven-year long battle of Kazkhan, a knight and a sorcerer aim to solve their king's mysterious demise

● **The Dog and the Sparrow (right), 2007** Reiko, daughter of Professor Murakami and La Mancha, her ever-loyal yojimbo

Like many of our readers, you grew up in the 1980s. What inspired you during childhood?

As a child of the Eighties, the visuals of cartoons and comics made quite an impression on me. Videogames were still in the 8-bit or 16-bit era during that time, so videogame graphics weren't my major inspiration for visuals yet. But those videogame manuals and box covers were full of illustrations, which formed part of my inspiration while growing up. We didn't have the internet back then either, so all my visual stimuli came solely from cartoons, comics and toys (which had cartoons and comics of their own).

Growing up in the Philippines must have exposed you to an interesting melting pot of Western and Eastern cartoons and comics. What were your favourites and why? And which ones specifically did you draw as a kid?

One of the few perks of living in an Americanised country in Asia was that we were never in short supply of American comics and Japanese cartoons. These forms of entertainment were so widespread that they didn't just reach kids; adults would read the comics and watch the cartoons too. My favourite TV shows were *G.I. Joe*, *Transformers*, *Voltes V* and *Daimos*. My favourite American comic was *X-Men*. As a kid, I drew a lot of fan art of these cartoons and comics. The first thing I ever drew that wasn't a school

requirement was the super sentai group Choudenshi Bioman. I don't think it was released in the West, but *Bioman* is like an early version (the original and more awesome!) of *Power Rangers*.

You've described yourself as self-taught. How did you teach yourself – what resources did you use, what techniques did you practise and how?

I'm self-taught in the sense that I've never had formal training with professors in an art school. Even so, I studied a lot of books, read a lot of magazine tutorials and observed a lot of media to learn what I know now. I suppose you could call it research; I found out about the tools comics artists used, so I bought those or equivalents. I practised what was in the tutorials to pick up a technique I liked. I emulated the styles of artists that I admired. I did all this just to get myself going. I didn't know if it was the right direction, but I liked where I was going.

Only years later, as a working professional, did I find out that I had developed some bad habits in my techniques, due to all that trial and error. That's something I could have avoided if I went to art school, but it's all in the past now. I had to make do with what I had, stumbled twice as much and learned as a result. And that – the countless hours of pure work and practice – isn't something any school can give any student.



“No matter how big or small the project... I try to do the best I can”

We heard that as a teenager you broke an elbow and had to spend six months without drawing at all. Do you think this had an effect on the development of your technique and style?

During the time my elbow was broken it was never a guarantee that I'd be able to use my dominant hand just as it was before the accident. All those months I was never sure that I could draw again, so you can imagine my anxiety. But when the cast came off, slowly and surely, I willed myself to get back on track. I was determined to draw again, no matter what. I drew every day. A few months later I regained the full and proper use of my right arm. That's when I told myself to do my best in each and every drawing, knowing that I could've lost it had things gone horribly wrong. It's a principle I carry to this day; no matter how big or small the project, no matter how low or high the stakes are on a sketch, I try to do the best I can, all the time.

When did you first start work in the art industry? What was your first job?

I got my first job at 21 years old, six months after graduating college. I was a graphic artist for a mobile content development company. I made wallpapers and picture messages for display on cellular phones. Back then, cellular phones weren't as technologically-sophisticated as a normal 2012 smartphone with their wide range of colours and high-resolution displays. Back then, the mobile-phone graphics I had to make were 72 x 14 pixels, with a file size limit of 2 kilobytes, on a black and white screen! Eventually, coloured screens entered the cellular phone market, so the image dimensions, file sizes and colour range were expanded, allowing me to create (slightly) better graphics. I made the jump to a mobile games company shortly after.

You spent several years living in Singapore and working as an art director at Imaginary Friends Studios. For many of our readers, working with Stanley Lau and the rest of the team would be a dream come true – what was it really like?

Working with Imaginary Friends Studios opened my eyes to different techniques and approaches to illustration. It goes without saying that I also got to work alongside some of the most awesome artists I know. IFS was and still is a close-knit group of artists who share a broad range of interests that remarkably get along well. A typical day at IFS starts with us doing client work, going to each others' tables to joke around and share techniques or the latest inspiring artist we've discovered. Come break time, we'll have a few rounds of *Street Fighter* or *SoulCalibur* around the couch. A

few more hours in the afternoon for more work and joking around. The end of the work day is capped off with several bouts of *Defense of the Ancients*. It's pretty neat. As for Stan himself, he's probably the closest to what I would consider a mentor. An incredible artist not only for the quality of his work, but that insane speed of his in making his masterpieces! Aside from the artistry, Stan and the IFS crew have a quality that I value in any artist: they are, first and foremost, good people. Surprisingly (for me, at least), that's not a quality you see in a lot of artists who produce great work.

After working for IFS you made the decision to return home and go freelance. What, for you, are the good and bad points of working in a studio versus working freelance?

Working in a studio is great because you can share stuff easily – inspiration and techniques all as part of the social interaction. Being part of a studio enables you to take on a large volume of projects; you get to work on a lot of stuff and you consequently earn a lot as well. One of the downsides is the number of people an artwork has to go through just to be approved. A flat hierarchy and a small group in a studio helps to avoid this pitfall. Another downside is when there aren't enough projects and there are a lot of artists, there'll be tough times ahead; a studio's cash flow is quite sensitive. Freelancing is great for short-term and low-volume projects. A freelancer's time is flexible and, if he's working at a home office, a freelancer can wear anything that he wants – or nothing at all! While a freelancer's cash flow is also sensitive, it doesn't spell trouble for a lot of people if a freelancer doesn't have a lot of projects, unlike a studio. In the end, it's all about which setup you're more comfortable in at a given point in time. Both have clear advantages and disadvantages, so it's just a matter of choice.

The digital art scene in the Philippines is becoming more and more exciting as the years go on – what was it like when you were starting out, and how do you think it has changed or evolved since you returned?

The age of the internet has been a great boon to the digital art scene. I was fortunate enough to start my career just around the same time that the internet became commonplace here in the Philippines. I owe the internet a lot in terms of getting my work some international exposure and gathering research materials (inspirational artworks and photographs, software tutorials and so on). Once the internet age firmly established itself not only among the youth but all of society, we saw an explosion of multimedia art schools here. Suddenly, computer-generated artworks, graphic design and motion design have become a solid enough industry that the local schools are offering specialised courses in them. Game-





development companies, visual-effects companies, graphic-design studios – a lot of these businesses have started setting up with the capacity to handle local and international clients. Who knows, one of these days the industries might grow big enough to erase the stereotype of the starving artist completely.

What role do you think you and your work have played in that?

I'd like to think that I'm at least one of the innumerable people working in the local digital industry who are proofs-of-concept that making a career out of digital media isn't as unstable as a lot of people over here once thought. I'm one of the thousands of lab mice who infected the other lab mice. We were the patient zeros. It's up to the next generation to sustain this concept of digital media as a continuing business and evolve it further. But really I have no way to gauge how I've influenced the younger kids; I'm just trying to do my best work and hope that it inspires them somehow, whether in their future careers or in just simply viewing the artwork at that moment.

“ We were the patient zeros. [Now] it's up to the next generation ”

We talked about your childhood inspirations earlier. What would you say your primary influences and inspirations are right now?

These days I scour the internet for inspiring photographs, product design, sculpture, graphic design and architecture. I still have my usual dose of comics, animation and videogames, but my interests have since extended to the other aspects of visual art. I've also been getting into 3D lately, which is a whole new ball game outside of my Photoshop comfort zone. Also, and this is something I've started doing ever since I began working, I've been paying more attention to mundane, everyday things – details and moments, mostly – in real life. I store all these new inspirations in my head so that one day, when the artwork calls for it, I can put these ideas and influences on the canvas.

What are your favourite digital and traditional mediums or software to work in, and why?

I love Photoshop and my Wacom graphics tablet. Those two, for good or ill, have shaped my techniques and my output towards a certain style that I wouldn't be able to achieve through traditional means. The power of these tools is incredible! The layers system and the history states are extremely useful features. As such, they must be used responsibly. If you fuss too much with powerful tools, you'll never get any work done!

Are there digital or traditional techniques or programs you'd like to learn more about?

As a consequence of going all-digital, my traditional drawing skills have gone rusty. It wasn't a conscious decision, just something that happened in the natural course of things. I spend too much time with digital media, so I'd like to get back to using pencil, ink and paper again, since I miss the feeling of accomplishment that comes with a tangible, finished piece of artwork. Right now, though, I'm dabbling a little in 3D modelling, experimenting with how it integrates with my 2D illustrations. Learning something new is always fun; it keeps me on the move and presents fresh challenges.

Do you have a set workflow? What is it?

My workflow for clients usually goes like this: conceptualisation, thumbnails, rough sketch, rough painting, painting progress and then finishing touches. I work in phases to minimise revisions on the finished artwork by tweaking anything that needs changing early on. For my personal artworks, I usually jumble the workflow, depending on what works for me. I find that working this way is much more playful and the results are sometimes unexpected, like any experiment. The conceptualisation part in both workflows take a huge chunk of my time and brain power. It helps me imagine the finished visual in my head, and helps me make decisions on important aspects of the artwork before I even begin.

You said on CGHub: “If Photoshop was a girl, [you'd] marry it”. Does any other software come close to Photoshop for you?

Right now, there's no other software that compares to Photoshop in terms of the way it fits into my workflow, the range of artistic choices it offers and the clean user interface. I'm sure I can achieve the same results with other software, but I'd rather spend time creating artworks than learning a new program that creates the same or similar results. Other digital artists swear by other software, Photoshop just happens to be the program I'm thoroughly familiar with, and I'm satisfied with its effects on my work. And it keeps getting better; I'm excited to get my hands on Photoshop CS6 and take it for a spin.

Finally, what are your plans for the future?

I've got a pet project brewing, which I won't mention just yet lest I jinx it. Let's just say it has panels, balloons and it's all mine. As for projects I can talk about, me and my friends from The Paper Vandals will be releasing an animated short film sometime in the fourth quarter of this year, co-produced with Tuldok Animation Studios. There's also an up-coming artbook featuring manga-inspired local illustrators, also out by the end of the year. Career-wise, the freelance path leads in many directions. Games, a studio, an artbook – I'm interested in getting into these in the future. No concrete plans just yet. For now, I'm just making the most I can with the freedom and challenges of freelancing, while I can.



● **Amber Crescendo** (above), 2006
An enchanting and consuming temptress with a strong side!

● **Last Dance** (right), 2012
Another new piece from Chester's portfolio with a flowing composition

● **Princess Malya** (below), 2009
Chester worked on the character design and promo illustration of Princess Malya a few months ago
© Soda Pop Miniatures, Inc



“ Learning new
[things] is always
fun; it keeps me
on the move ”



Community

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Guild Wars 2 thrills fantasy art fans

ArenaNet's hotly anticipated MMO brings fantasy art from the industry's finest to a worldwide audience

After years in development, ArenaNet's *Guild Wars 2* is due for release on 28 August 2012. The game has been hotly anticipated, not just because gamers want to return to the fantasy world of Tyria, but because the concept art created to flesh out that world is something truly special.

Under the formidable art direction of Daniel Dociu, the world of Tyria has changed dramatically since the original game with a range of new narrative and gaming elements. "Since *Guild Wars 2* takes place 250 years after *Guild Wars*, we wanted to introduce new technology to the world of Tyria", explains developer ArenaNet. "From the mystical tech of the asura to the industrial war machines of the charr, *Guild Wars 2* unmistakably takes place in a different era than the original game, and the weaponry and machinery reflect that. Firearms will definitely be part of the equation — but with a unique twist."

The addition of firearms has seen Tyria and its characters experience something of an industrial revolution.

Lead concept artist Kekai Kotaki did much of the work at the coalface. He and his team created new character types, such as the thief and guardian, and a whole new playable race in the shape of the sylvari, tree-like plant creatures with mystical powers. Their aim throughout the process has been to create a believable online world that hangs together beautifully.

That could have proved a challenge as the world of Tyria takes in several major continents, with climates ranging from northern European or north American in inspiration to African-style savannahs and plains, Asian-inspired jungles, deadly deserts and much more. In addition to rebuilding all of these environments in a setting 250 years after the storyline of the original game, the team also had to add a new environment: water.

Another challenge for the concept artists is that several races inhabit the world of *Guild Wars 2*. Along with the plant-like sylvari there are the asura, a race of mouse-like, anime-looking engineers; the charr, barbarian bipeds who resemble hyenas or wildcats, the larger-than-life humanoid norn and, of course, humans. Artists and designers have had to think carefully about how these disparate races — with vastly different sizes, body types and features — can come together in a player-generated team, but ArenaNet reckons that their stellar team of concept artists and game designers has pulled it off: "We built *Guild Wars 2* with the notion to bring players together to experience what a true online world experience should be, and we couldn't be more excited with the reception we're receiving from gamers wanting to get in and play our game", said Mike O'Brien, president of ArenaNet and executive producer of *Guild Wars 2*.



Environments had to show how Tyria evolved over 250 years



Learn more at www.guildwars2.com

Norn ranger Eir Stegalkin and her wolf companion Garm are major NPCs in the game



Concept art from development is displayed on the game's loading screens

GUILD WARS 2 GOODIES



Guild Wars 2 charr plushie

£24.99/\$34.99US

www.guildwars2.com/en/shop

● Okay, so they razed the city of Ascalon to the ground in the original game, but look at this cuddly charr's little face! This 17-inch long plushie may not strike fear into the heart of your enemies, but even so we reckon he's the perfect companion for in-game raids.



Guild Wars 2 wall graphics

From \$14.95US (£10 approx)

www.guildwars2.com/en/shop

● Decorate your walls with this range of *Guild Wars 2* art pieces by Kekai Kotaki. They're available in a range of sizes, from small enough to fit on the back of your tablet at under \$20, to seven-foot wide wall graphics for \$142.52 (£91.19 approx).



The Art of Guild Wars 2

£17.99/\$24.99US

www.guildwars2.com/en/shop

● This gorgeously glossy hardback art book features some of the early concept art for *Guild Wars 2*. Illustrations by Daniel Docu, Kekai Kotaki and a host of other luminaries from the dev team showcase the incredible art that underpins the game.



This month we take a look at some of the most popular fantasy and sci-fi artwork that's been submitted to the galleries over the past few weeks



Guide by yigitkoroglu (yigitkoroglu.deviantart.com) makes excellent use of a subtle, muted palette to create a dramatic and detailed image.



Creation by sakimichan (sakimichan.deviantart.com) combines nature and fantasy very well. We particularly love the effect the artist has achieved with the flow of rainbow hair in the river.



The World of Tomorrow Yesterday by alexiuss (alexiuss.deviantart.com), one of our most popular digital artists, has a quirky and unique style.

Next month we'll take a look at the latest round of community-suggested Daily Deviations. If you have any suggestions for inclusion please email me at fiona@deviantart.com – until then, stay devious! deviantART.com | fiona@deviantart.com



Artist spotlight Claire Hummel

We meet the US-based artist who has been working professionally since she was 15 and doesn't show any signs of stopping



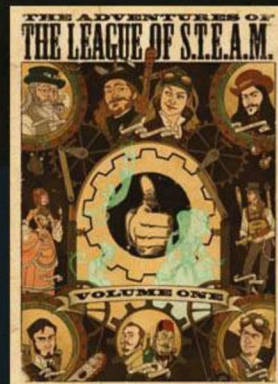
Claire Hummel is the brains behind the historically accurate Disney princesses that are so popular on deviantART. She believes that this kind of attention to detail is important for artists: "You learn the rules so you

can break them", she explains. "If you're designing characters and costumes within a historical context, I can almost guarantee that your initial ideas will be nowhere near as weird and compelling as what actually existed hundreds of years ago. It's pretty cool, to say the least."

Claire is also a poster girl for self belief and for loving what you do. She garnered her first industry job at 15: "I sent a number of boldly inquisitive emails to www.neopets.com about an art job; emails I probably wouldn't have the guts to send out now... but lo and behold I got the job, and ended up working there every summer until I graduated from college."

Now working full time as a visual development artist for Microsoft Studios, she's worked on a range of high-profile projects, including *Kinectimals* and *Alan Wake*. But there are still ambitions that she'd like to fulfil. "Walt Disney Imagineering, with Walt Disney Animation Studios as a close second. What can I say? Childhood dreams die hard."

Discover more of Claire's work at www.shoomlah.com



The DVD cover and poster promoting The League of S.T.E.A.M. (a steampunk performance art group). I was commissioned to create this cover for them. It debuted at Comic-Con 2011




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Community



Chase, 2012
"A futuristic car chase"

Mini Lab Concept, 2012
"Thrilling and horrifying"

Abbadon, 2012
"God of destruction"



Artist retrospective

Artist info



BRYAN MARVIN P SOLA
bpsola.deviantart.com

I am a 23-year-old multimedia arts graduate from Asia Pacific College in the Philippines. Dylan Cole's works deeply inspired me to pursue my career as a graphic artist, and I became a senior concept artist for a game-outsourcing company in the Philippines after graduating. I have done work for book publishers and game companies, and hope some day to work for Hollywood films.

Chase 2012, Photoshop

● A sci-fi scene of a futuristic car chase. A group of thugs in a hover bike are trying to chase the ship, causing lots of destruction in the city. I always wanted to work on illustrations with a cinematic and dynamic vibe. Pieces like this make me want to work on movies and games. This was created in Photoshop with custom brushes and photo textures.

Mini Lab Concept 2012, Photoshop

● My love for matte painting drives my passion to work on environment and set designs. For this piece, I created a laboratory-room concept with both a thrilling and horrifying mood. This piece was inspired by some sci-fi games and movies. Most of the elements seen here are portions from different stock photos.



Ellira, the Voracious, 2012
"A devourer casting its spell"

Alamid, 2011
"A personal creature concept. The creature transports slaves"

Naida Yarden, the Watercaster, 2011
"An elemental master"

Wrath of Grutus, 2011
"A demonic leader"



Abbadon

2012, **Photoshop**

● I have always been fond of creating unique fantasy character designs, so here I designed a fantasy character concept with a loose cinematic rendering. This is Abbadon, the god of destruction, meditating in his own world beneath the earth and causing natural calamities and destruction all around the globe.

Alamid

2011, **Photoshop**

● This is a personal creature concept called Alamid. A Komodo dragon-looking creature, he is used by the kingdom rulers to transport slaves from one place to another. However, there are some instances where these creatures haven't been able to resist eating the slaves instead of bringing them to the right destinations.

Wrath of Grutus

2011, **Photoshop**

● Here I created my own character design which shows a demonic leader, resembling a human, shouting and expressing his anger. This piece was inspired by a *Magic: The Gathering* card game illustration. I like how the character design turned out. The grungy textures and spiky designs make him look more badass!

Ellira, the Voracious

2012, **Photoshop**

● This piece shows a character design of a devourer casting its spell, with its ribcage open and completely dry except for the glowing heart that holds its existence. Her heart sucks in lost spirits of the world, which makes her more and more powerful. Her goal is to harvest the required number of spirits so she can bring back her youth.

Naida Yarden, the Watercaster

2011, **Photoshop**

● An elemental master practising water-bending skills on a shore. The tattoos have been there since she was born. Whenever she's in trouble, these symbols enable her to control the element of water to protect herself. My goal is to make her look as aggressive as a fighter in spite of her mystical capabilities.



● Ken illustrates strange creatures from imaginary worlds, with these taking inspiration from the sea

Artist spotlight Ken Barthelmey

This Luxembourg-based illustrator has only been working as a freelance illustrator for six months, but in that time he's created some incredible pieces. "I always try to bring as much realism and authenticity into my concepts and illustrations as possible", he says.



Influenced at an early age by *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Ken is a keen fan of sci-fi and fantasy art, and describes it as his specialist subject, particularly when it comes to creature design.

"My goal is to amaze everybody with my creations. I want to create new worlds and show

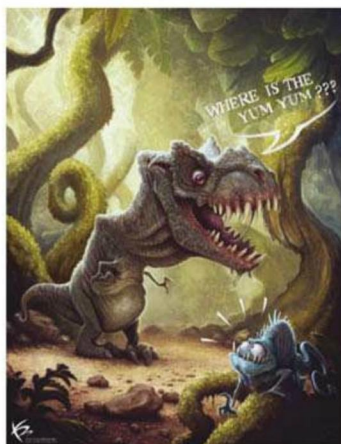
something that you've never seen before. But I also want to inspire people and show the world how animals from other planets could look and live." It is the smaller elements that make Ken's fantasy pieces so successful, as if the creatures could really exist: "I'm simply a detail freak, I love painting small details like the texture of skin. That's the reason why some of my paintings look almost photo-realistic. Some people who see my images think that I work with 3D software, but everything I do is 2D."

As a young artist, Ken stresses that he is still very much developing, evolving his art style and learning as he goes along: "Before now I often used photo textures and some photomanipulations for my works, but that's not the case anymore", he says. So what does the future hold? "I am a newcomer artist, so I'm at the beginning of my career. My dream is to work on big blockbusters and see my creations come alive on screen."

● See more of Ken's fantastical work at theartofken.com



● These sketches break down the body and facial structure of a centaur character



● This dino shows a crossover between serious creature design and caricature



● This image was done for an online challenge on a digital art website

THE VFX FESTIVAL

The Visual Effects Festival is a five-day spectacular exploring the breath-taking world of visual effects. The festival will inspire, inform and take you behind the clever trickery and mind-blowing magic of this booming industry.

Packed with respected VFX legends & companies who have shaped the industry there'll be insider info, showreel demos, hands-on workshops and exclusive premieres, showcasing some of the greatest visual effects talent in the UK.

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Featured artists



Gloria Piñeiro Muñiz

www.digitalartistdaily.com/user/GloriaPM

"I am a freelance visual artist with a love for both realistic and whimsical styles of painting in subjects ranging from fantasy to cute characters."



Helge C. Balzer

www.digitalartistdaily.com/user/helgecbalzer

"I try to create alternatives to what fantasy art often looks like. Believable characters must go deeper than just sex and archetype."



Kit Jo Yuki

www.digitalartistdaily.com/user/Kit%20Jo%20Yuki

"I'm a fantasy artist currently working in the feature film industry. All my work is created using Photoshop, and my favourite subjects include gothic ladies and angels."



Mark Golding

www.digitalartistdaily.com/user/LEEBLEEB

"I am a self-taught freelance illustrator and character concept artist. I only use digital media in my work, mostly using PaintTool SAI and some 3D. I enjoy painting both fantasy and science fiction genres."

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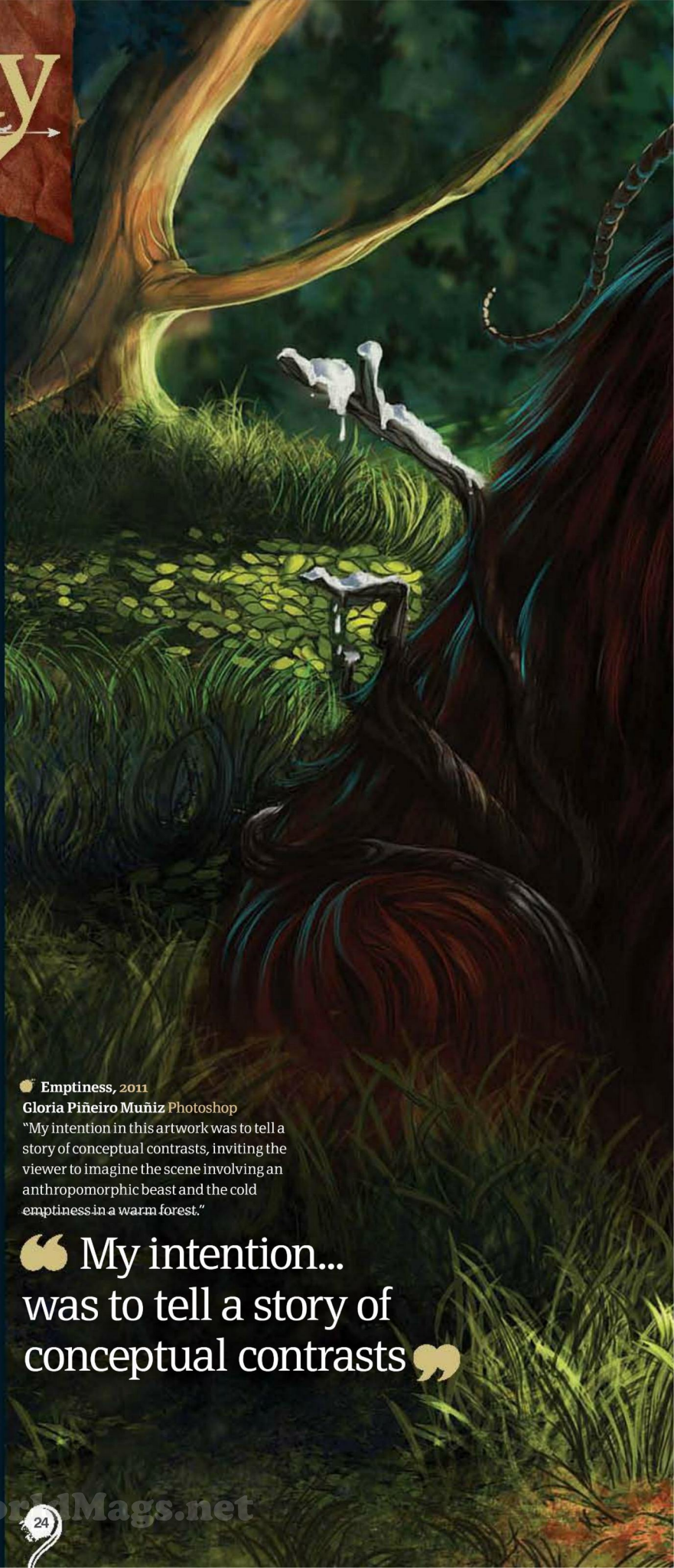
fantasyartist@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Emptiness, 2011

Gloria Piñeiro Muñiz Photoshop

"My intention in this artwork was to tell a story of conceptual contrasts, inviting the viewer to imagine the scene involving an anthropomorphic beast and the cold emptiness in a warm forest."

“ My intention... was to tell a story of conceptual contrasts ”





Community



● **The Alchemist, 2011**

Helge C. Balzer Photoshop

This is a character design I made some time ago. I tried to figure out a new direction of what a mage, wizard or alchemist could look like: a step away from Tolkien and the usual high fantasy stuff.



● **Between the Shadows, 2011**
Kit Jo Yuki Photoshop
 "A commissioned painting of a nephilim character named Jezebel. The entire piece was painted in monotone before colour was applied in layers, much like traditional oils. The rays of moonlight were definitely the biggest challenge!"

● **Little Red Space Riding Hood versus the Wolf Demon, 2010**
Mark Golding PaintTool SAI
 "A drawing set in a science-fiction universe, where Little Red Riding Hood would be a galactic soldier who protects the innocent, fights monsters and bad people in a *Star Wars*-type setting. [The piece] took about a day to paint and was painted with no reference."



To get your work showcased on these pages, create a gallery at
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SYMMETRY

The two bull-headed statues balance the scene, encouraging the viewer to look at the action.

APEX

The strongest focal point is at the top of the triangle, forcing our gaze to the astonished king and laughing genie girl.

BASE

The dais at the bottom of the image makes a strong and solid base, reinforcing this scene of a ruler on his throne.

FLOW

The shocked slaves and attendants dropping things or standing back aghast give a flowing rhythm to the piece that draws the eye.

01 Compose with shapes

A strong underlying shape makes for fantasy art that really stands out. In this image, the triangle is key to how the composition works.

Oh God!
Created by Alon Chou in 2007
as his entry to the Strange
Behavior competition

50 tips, tricks and techniques to improve your fantasy art

To produce great fantasy art you need talent and dedication, but there's no harm in using a few shortcuts and secrets too...

Genius is one per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration, according to Thomas Edison. You can't do an awful lot about whether you've been gifted with that first one per cent, but there's an awful lot to play for in the other 99.

We will focus on four main areas to help any fantasy artist improve their work. The first is the craft, pure and simple. Second there is Photoshop, and third other programs. Last, we'll look at workflow and the constant challenge of creating work to a deadline.

Lois van Baarle (www.loish.net) believes that success lies in practising your drawing basics. She "Learned how to sketch and

draw quickly in animation school... I think sketching skills are the single most important way to get artwork... full of personality."

For Pascal Blanché (www.3dluvr.com/pascalb), hard work is everything: "All great artists I admire are hard workers. They are working on it each and every day, sometimes they [have] the same problems we all come across; difficulties, deadlines, lack of motivation... But because that never stopped them, they are where they are now, and guess what? They are still hard workers. Because nothing comes easily and you have to fight for it. So love what you do, and never stop aiming higher."



Go with the flow

02 Keep your sketches rough and loose. In the planning stages, put more emphasis on flow and expression than on anatomical precision. "Shapes, movement and direction are more important than details, which can be added later. This approach reduces stiffness in the final drawing", says Lois van Baarle.



The golden ratio

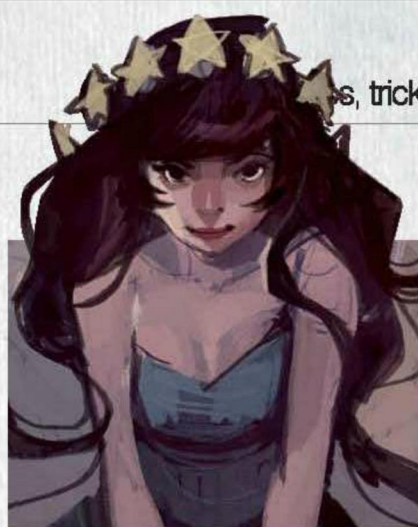
03 The golden ratio is a number found in nature, as well as the scale of great architecture like the pyramids and Notre Dame cathedral, that is appealing to the human eye. The idea is that while symmetry can be neat, certain ratios (such as this one, based on phi) or certain ways of dividing an image for composition, will be more attractive.

The meaning of colour

04 Colours come to have meanings, some of which are universal, some of which vary from culture to culture. For instance, the eye perceives yellow faster than any other colour, making it perfect for traffic signs around the world. And colours also appear different, depending on what other hues are around them. Red will appear brighter next to black than it will next to white, for example.

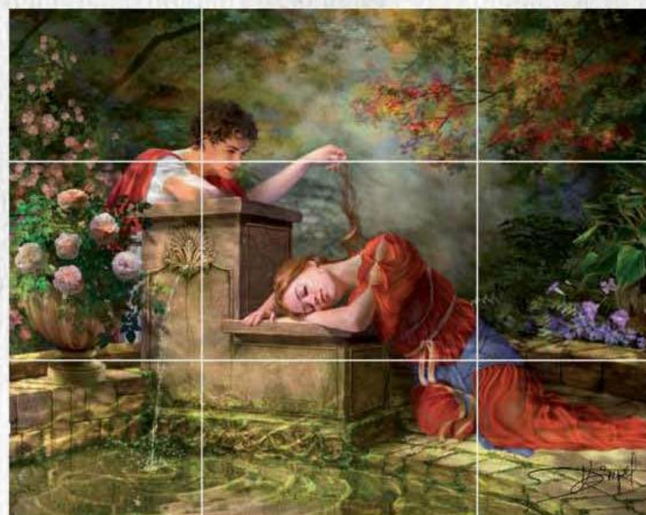
Analogous colours

05 Every school child knows that there are three primary colours (red, yellow and blue) that can be mixed together to create the secondary colours (orange, green and purple.) What some people might not remember is that mixing primary and secondary creates a tertiary colour. Schemes regarded as harmonious are either colours next to each other on a colour wheel (analogous) or opposite (complementary).



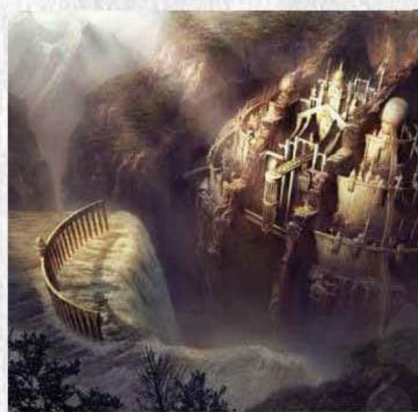
From dark into light

06 When the sketch is done and she's ready to start painting, Lois starts with a dark base and paints lighter shades on top. She says: "This gives the colouring more depth and a more defined sense of mass and shape than when I start with a lighter colour. It also results in richer colours and a nicer hue for the shadows."



The rule of thirds

09 Used in photography as well as painting and design, the rule of thirds proposes that if you divide your image into nine equal squares, the areas of interest should lie on the intersections of the resulting lines. Rules are, of course, meant to be broken.



Compare and contrast

10 Backgrounds are important. They mustn't distract from the person, and in A Lonely Heart, Alon Chou has mirrored the straight up and down of the trees with his young queen's flowing garments. The colours are equally muted. The gesture of her hands placed carefully, in a slightly raised position, really stands out. "Since she can't hear from her king, she feels quite lonely", Chou explains of the image.



Drops of colour

08 Try and get your initial idea down on a layer – however roughly – before it escapes you. For Lois van Baarle, the key is to create a rough version of the colours she wants. This is useful because she can "pick colours off the canvas and paint with them." This is made easier with Opt/Alt-clicking to make the Eyedropper tool appear, and means that the image in her mind's eye gradually appears on her screen.

Make a mess

11 Lois van Baarle likes to start her colouring "messy." She says: "I just slap really rough colours onto the image and mess around with it until I like what I see. Using colour-editing controls plays a huge role in this process – Hue/Saturation, Color Balance and Replace Color are the options I use most."

Make time with masks

12 "Layer masks are your friend", says Ryan Portillo (www.ryanportillo.com). "Not having to slow your stroke to keep an edge is such a [time] saver, so take your time creating that mask, but once you've got it, paint like a mad man as that edge isn't going anywhere!"



Finishing touches

13 It's important to make sure an image is really ready. Lois van Baarle says she plays "around a little with the lighting, adding darker vignettes and brightening some areas. I also add some finishing colour modifications – with Hue/Saturation or Color Balance – to make the colours come together at the end."



Draw attention to the parts you want to highlight

14 Distribution of details is key. Lois van Baarle uses this trick to pull focus to the face and eyes. She explains: "I like putting most of the detail on the part of the image that I want the focus to be on... and [I] keep other parts rough. Adding depth-of-field effects with [the] Blur filters can be fun too. Using vignettes and highlights are also really important."

Don't undo

15 Ryan Portillo says he limits the number of his Photoshop "history states to speed up the program. I figure that by not giving myself so many undos I'll be forced to make more deliberate and informed painting decisions, which improves my draughtsmanship and keeps me on point."

Manage expectations

16 Ryan advises: "Manage the canvas size to just slightly higher than the final resolution. Sizing down at the end keeps things tight, it's generally not recommended to up-res." He adds: "You can never have enough RAM nor a machine with a big enough processor, because Photoshop will consume as much as you give it."

Get kitted up

17 "Anything that you can do to keep yourself in the image and keep your creative flow", is a must, says Ryan. He has a Razor Nostromo, "that I've plugged all my hot keys into." He finds it makes things even quicker, creating custom tool shortcuts.



Bringing textures together

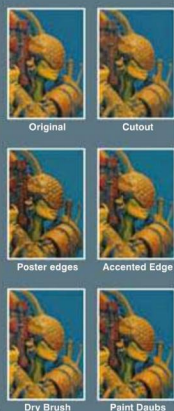
18 When finishing off a piece, game artist Ryan uses the Texturizer filter "to harmonise all the brushwork and textures... (usually the Sandstone or Canvas). I merge the canvas and paste it into a new layer, then implement the filter and play with opacity."

Overlay your colours

19 Ryan says he's been timid with his use of colour in the past, "leaning more heavily on a strong tonal underpainting and then just tinting the painting with colour." He does use some colour theory, though: "I determine the mood I'm going for and limit my palette. For anger or intensity I might go for some strong punch points with reds and oranges."

Using Photoshop's filters

20 They've become a byword for cheap Photoshop trickery that 'real' artists don't use, but – if you know what you're doing – filters can be a great asset to your fantasy work, improving form and colour.



1. Filter fun

Pascal Blanché doesn't want his images to have the "cold, clean aspect" that 3D work can sometimes have, so he turns to Photoshop. He makes as many copies of the render as there are filters he wants to try, like Cutout, Poster Edges and Paint Daubs.

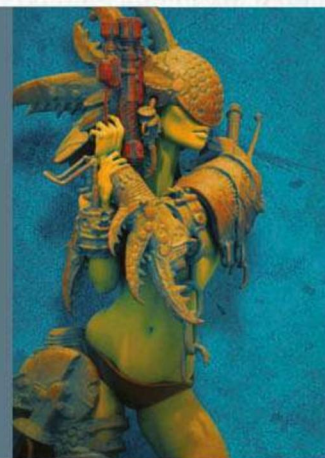


2. Onto the colour phase

He works out what he likes and beds the effect in by erasing it from certain areas. He also does his entire colour reworking in Photoshop. First he uses the Color Picker palette to isolate tones he chooses.

3. Bring it all together

By keeping them all on separate layers, you can bring it back together once you're ready. The filters and the colour editing bring a more human touch to Blanché's images than 3ds Max and ZBrush would have managed alone.



How to give your image texture

21 Lois van Baarle makes her image *Toaster to Ride* stand out by varying the textures in the piece, from gritty walls to sleek hair and shiny robot toasters.

BACKGROUND DETAIL

Everyone has their favourite type of textures, with Lois noting: "I often use images of concrete or plaster walls, which have fine, grainy details."

LAYERS

Find the sort of texture you want to add, and put it on a separate layer. Now tweak your opacity and blending modes until it mixes seamlessly.

CONTRAST

Using textures gives a more organic look to the piece – especially when contrasted with the smoother parts of the image – to give a believable edge to fantastical scenes.

WORKFLOW

Add the texture early in the process and you can merge it with the colouring layer to enable you to essentially paint on the texture.

TOASTER TO RIDE

Lois van Baarle created this image in Photoshop, paying particular attention to texture details to enhance the futuristic feel.

Photoshop pull-ups

22 If you want to get better at Photoshop and art generally, then practise every day. Ryan Portillo says: "Nothing beats consistent practice; creating great art is just like exercise, the more you do it the more effortless it becomes. Just like weight lifting, art muscles need resistance training to develop further, so constant challenge and practice will lead to speedier and stronger work."

Don't go negative

23 Ryan doesn't have a strict method for composition, but he does decide on the focal points early on so he can: "Plant them in the scene first and then use secondary and tertiary images to steer eyes away from the negative spaces in the canvas back into the main render points of my images. That said, I'll often use S shapes and spirals when designing a comp to keep the visual flow."



Blurry beauty

24 Lois van Baarle admits there are "a few filters that I'm kind of addicted to." Most important to her is Gaussian Blur, which she regularly uses to, "add depth of field or emphasise glows and rim lights." She also uses, "the chromatic aberration effect on monochromatic drawings, and Unsharp Mask [to add] extra emphasis to my brushstrokes."

Lock down your layers

25 Halfway through a painting, the number of layers you have can reach endemic proportions. It's good while you're learning to keep them all (and name them all), but Drazenka Kimpel believes it's best to reduce "the number of layers by merging them and leaving very few main ones... This has proven to speed up my workflow and keeps the file size down as well."





Up close and personal

26 Zooming in so that you can see expressions and detail can really draw the viewer into a scene", says Nick Harris, "and help them identify with the emotions." Especially effective when dealing with the magical and fantastical, if you can take the viewer up close to something they could never really be up close to, they'll be captivated. If you work on a really big canvas, as well, you'll be able to get in as much detail as possible.



Bring your personality to the party

27 Don't forget to enjoy yourself – whatever software program you're using – as well as working hard. "Whether it's horror, technology, humour, magic or whatever floats your particular boat, bring that to the party when you can. Passion shows, usually helps generate better results and can provide individuality too. Bring your personality to what you make", says Nick Harris.

Speed up rendering

28 If you work in 3D packages and then bring your renders into Photoshop, save yourself time and stress by keeping any test renders quick and small. Do you need to render it at full image size? Probably not. Lights are one of the big things that slow rendering down, so you could cut them to a minimum, lower the quality of your shadows and reduce the polygon count on your objects. Don't leave the render settings on default, either.

Flexibility and faces

29 Don't get stuck with an idea of how an image should be. Instead let the digital workflow allow you to be flexible about where an image is going.

DESIGN FOCUS

The head doesn't just work to balance the composition, it is also going to attract the viewer's eye. Harris says: "Faces are big hotspots... We naturally seek out our own kind in imagery."

EYE GUIDE

Harris says that he was taught that composition was the way to guide a viewer around the painting. However, he explains that James Gurney's research has shown new things: "We used to think that the viewer's gaze moved from point to point following a linear path through elements of the image." However, "eye-tracking technology has revealed a more haphazard truth. It rides an electric pogo stick that hops here, there and everywhere taking everything in, but repeatedly returning to key elements", faces being top of the list.

FIX HOLES

Expanding the canvas gave him a lot of space at the front of the image. He explains: "If you spot a hole in your composition that unbalances it, experiment on additional layers. Alternatively you could expand or crop the canvas and fix any holes that this creates." He fixed one hole with a severed head.

BE FLEXIBLE

Children's and fantasy illustrator Nick Harris (nickillus.com) initially sketched a small girl standing on top of one dead monster. Then the body count grew, and so he expanded the canvas to fit.

DID SOMEBODY JUST SAY OW...

Did Somebody Just Say Ow... was painted by Nick Harris in 2007, using ArtRage

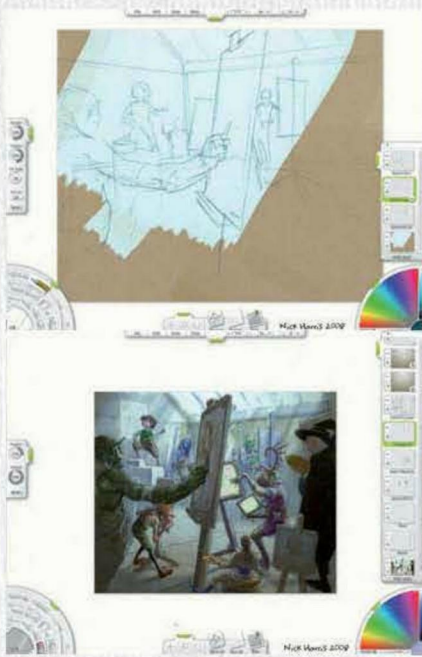


New programs and approaches

30 Every program has its pros and cons and, according to Nick Harris: "It's just a matter of finding the ones that suit you best." He uses "Painter, SketchBook Pro and ArtRage mostly, leaning towards the latter two recently", and advises you to: "Find which ones pander to your particular strengths and maybe help your weaknesses."

One step at a time

31 Complex compositions can be extremely rewarding, but you don't have to get it all down in one go. "Don't panic. Be methodical", says Nick Harris. "Always remember the bigger picture by addressing the largest elements, [the] main areas of light and dark, first. Get those right and the smaller ones will be more likely to fit into place", he advises.



Embrace what's easy

32 If you're using a program every day, it makes sense to get to know the keyboard shortcuts. Nick Harris explains: "ArtRage offers a Presets palette to save tools and their settings to, SketchBook Pro has a custom brush area to do the same, while Painter offers the ability to create a custom floating palette you can drag your favourites to, including papers."

Brushstrokes

33 Creating and using custom brushes is one of the great joys of Painter (among other programs), and the latest version makes this even easier. All you have to do is Save Variant if you want to save the brush, but you can also Save Look, which will save the paper texture, nozzle data and so on.

The big event

34 Whether you're a fantasy art newbie or an old pro, you could learn from yourself by using the Event function in openCanvas. It records every brushstroke you make and then packages it in a video so that you can watch the creation come to life. Best of all, though, you can stop the Event at any point and start working on the project from there.



Make a scene

35 3D modelling packages are filled with settings that automatically load when you open up a new scene, so when you've got a spare moment, it's worth creating a default of your own to start off any new project. It'll give you more time to make your work super detailed.

Find yourself

36 If you work with big images, you probably lose your position pretty regularly. The latest version of Painter has a solution for this in the Navigator panel, which enables you to move around without swapping tools. It also gives you lots of information about your document, including co-ordinates and resolution.



Fantasy sets you free

37 Nick Harris says: "The rules in fantasy imagery are much more elastic and dependent on the world you are depicting. Within each particular world rules may be rigid but still adhere to guidelines more flexible than exist... Yet keeping one foot in what we are familiar with while presenting fantasy imagery can make it more accessible to some viewers."

Create mood with lighting

38 Nick Harris used SketchBook Pro to create this moody image from 2007, *Matt the Vampire Hunter - Bad Blood*

Basic blocks

Lighting is vital if you're going to create atmosphere in an image, and there are no shortcuts. Observe how light falls, and practise trying to re-create it. Even at sketch stage, you need to know where the big areas of light and dark are going to be, so start by roughly blocking them in.



Layer it up

"You can build up subtle lighting patterns by filling layers with suitable shadow colours over the top of an image (set to Multiply) and then work into them erasing or painting with your chosen colour of light", says Harris, whose technique is ideal for this dark fantasy style.



Pause and observe

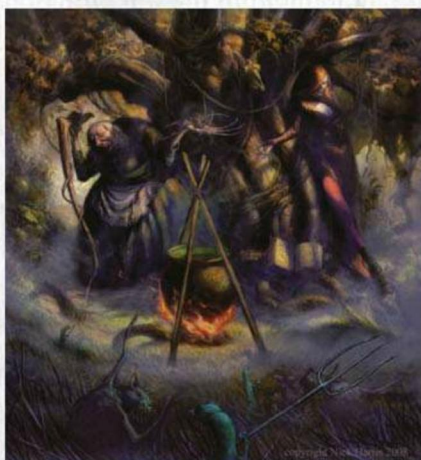
Like most things, assessing whether your lighting is finished can require fresh eyes, so take a break and then come back to it. The great thing about fantasy art is that some exaggeration can work, but lighting requires a bit of subtlety to really make your image stand out.





Points for professionalism

39 "Attack any job like you're being paid big money", says Ryan Portillo, "as when anyone sees your work they have no idea what you were paid, they only see your name and the image, so even if it's a cheap job, put that much more work into it so that it shines."



Blend modes in ArtRage

40 ArtRage offers a serious list of blend modes that are well worth exploring for fantastical art with impact. There are some of the ones you'd expect – Overlay, Color Burn and Multiply – as well as others that are a bit more unusual, like Watercolor.



Resist clichés

41 Lois van Baarle is not a fan of the "scantily clad, unrealistically posed superhero, elf or Amazonian figures, which can easily become an embarrassing male fantasy." She likes to make her female characters softer and give them more believable vital statistics.

Painter settings

42 Painter has always mimicked natural painting effects of course, but the recent addition of the Real Watercolor brushes has taken it to a new level. Such effects are perfect for more painterly fantasy art, harkening back to Frank Frazetta-style imagery. Tweak the paper and pigment settings on the tool so you can control how the paint settles, and use the Pause Diffusion button for complete control.

Creating mood

43 Whatever mood you want to create, searching for images that inspire it in you can be helpful. Alon Chou says that he keeps "pictures for mood reference close to my imagination... war scenes in movies, the saturated orange-toned battlefield when the sun goes down", and sketches from them.

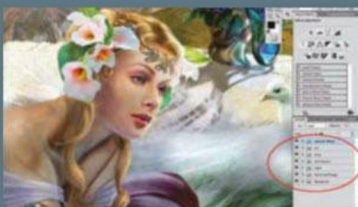


Avoid the action

44 Inexperienced artists sometimes make the mistake of being too obvious, of showing too much, when subtlety can really pay off. Nick Harris suggests: "The moments before or after a piece of action are often filled with more tension than the action itself. Depicting these moments allows the viewer to imagine what happens next or happened before for themselves. Do a good job on this and the imagined action will be fantastic."

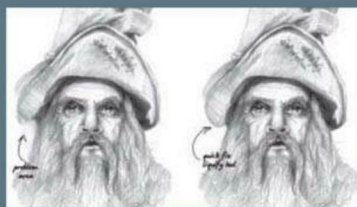
The quick fixes of the pros

45 When you're working to a deadline and possibly on more than one image at once, you need to be able to troubleshoot quickly and effectively. We show you how.



Find the flaws

When you think you're finished, Drazenka Kimpel advises you to flip the canvas so imperfections will pop out. Then, "if you need to quickly locate a layer to modify it, Ctrl/right-click on the area in your painting and all overlapping layers will come up on the list. Choose which one you were looking for."



Fix 'n' fudge

Obviously if the flaws are big ones, you'll probably paint over them, but if they're smaller you might be able to get away with a trick. "I will use a quick Liquify tool or simply use the Distortion tool", says Kimpel. "Simply make a selection, go to Edit>Transform>Distort, et voilà. That's a very simple and quick fix."



Painterly polish

Final polishes can make a massive difference. "The final painting appeared too dark... So, I've brought up the brightness and saturation a bit... Also, there were a few areas of the painting that were too dark so I brightened those up using various blending modes."

Advanced composition

46 Here Drazenka Kimpel shows how the golden spiral can be used to bring an image to life through dynamic composition.

THE GOLDEN SPIRAL

The golden spiral is another form of the golden ratio, which is basically one of those magical numbers that exists in nature and is pleasing to the eye. Taking a photograph of a golden spiral (flowers, shells) is one thing, but painting it is trickier.

MOVEMENT

Painting the woman's hair, arm and finger along the golden spiral creates a real sense of movement and gives the image focus. Kimpel says: "As long as the focal point in the painting is not competing for attention and the eye finds a clear exit point, I am happy with the composition."

PHANTOM

Drazenka Kimpel used Photoshop to create this mathematically harmonious image

CONSTRUCTION

Kimpel is "pretty methodical when it comes to the construction process", she says, "and ideally [I] want to have all the pieces of the picture in the right place before I get to the colouring stage. I call it 'construction' because it is a staging process in which I move the objects around the canvas, making them more comfortable and eye-pleasing."

LET IT EVOLVE

"Composition is something I am constantly working on and improving with each illustration. I do not think about it initially when I get inspired to create something new. It naturally evolves, as the idea grows clearer in my head", says Kimpel.



Push yourself

47 If you aren't a professional artist yet and you want to be one, act like you are. Set yourself deadlines and commission yourself with projects. Challenge yourself to something you know you're not quite capable of. And if you are a pro? Do the exact same thing, because personal work will invigorate your paid pieces.



Find your comfort zone...

48 Pascal Blanché has been using roughly the same pipeline for years now: "3ds Max to create the base, ZBrush to change proportions and add all the details, then back to 3ds Max for the shaders and lighting." He renders in V-Ray and touches up in Photoshop. "The whole process for an illustration takes me more or less six to eight hours now."



... and then escape it

49 Sometimes, if you're working to a deadline, you just have to keep your bottom in the chair and grind the work out. But if you're feeling a touch of artist's block and you have the time, you can take the opposite approach. Alon Chou finds that some casual outdoor sketching is good for both observation and inspiration at times.



Never stop learning

50 There's no reason that classical art history can't be inspiration for more modern subjects. Pascal Blanché was taught to look at one artist and then examine his influences, "and the influences that form those influences, back to the very beginning of art history sometimes... I still have that reflex to always question what I see in one illustration I like, and try to understand its roots."

Design a magical character

Zhonglu Zhao paints a fox spirit, taking inspiration from scenes in martial arts movies and model references

Qinnv

Photoshop



My aim is to highlight what I wanted to achieve with this illustration of a fox spirit, as well as my concept art and design process in general. As a professional concept artist, I start every piece with a picture in mind of the artwork I want it to be, but it does change and evolve throughout the process.

My advice to anyone going into concept art is to watch a lot of movies, look at a lot of art and read a lot of books. Other media is full of things that can influence and help you realise the kind of character you want to create. I was influenced by martial-arts movies, Asian folktales and novels, as well as an underwear fashion show while creating this character! Don't be afraid to draw from many different sources, because the way you put them together makes something that is uniquely yours.

I wanted to create a sexy oriental woman who was attractive but lethal at the same time. I therefore looked at fictional characters that exemplified this. The inspiration for her design was derived in part from the character of Snow (played by Brigitte Lin) in the martial-arts movie *Deadful Melody* (Liu Zhi Qin Mo). The central character has to protect a powerful and beautiful Chinese musical instrument, known as the magic lyre. Inspired by this, my character stands with her hand on a lyre-type instrument, known as a zither in the West and a guqin in China.

The role of Daisy in the ancient Chinese novel *Investiture of the Gods* had a profound impact on my design ideas too. In the novel, a fox possessed Daisy. Her coquettish beauty captured the heart of the king, and the country was paralysed. In the East, charm and magic are often symbolised by the fox in this way, and legends of fox spirits are also found in Chinese, Korean and Japanese folklore. Fox spirits can change their shape at will into beautiful women and live for hundreds of years. Their myths are similar to English stories of fairies; they can cast



● Determine her action and structure with a simple silhouette without going into too much detail. At this stage you should have a clear design direction.

illusions over places and take people out of time. Sometimes evil, sometimes good; but fox women are always beautiful and clever. I wanted to bring this into my piece of concept art to give it a distinctly oriental flavour. Fox women feature in some manga too, so I was confident that Western viewers would at least be familiar with them as an Asian art staple.

At the beginning of the drafting stage, I placed the image of the fox into the design, positioning it on the shoulder like a fur coat. I also developed the eyes to look out at the viewer. In the final draft, though, I removed the shoulder design and gave her fox ears instead. When creating concept art for a character, the viewer must focus on one thing, and that's the character. I felt the fox's eyes were distracting and pulling focus away from my woman, so they had to go. Pay attention to what an image tells you even at the sketch stage. If it looks too busy, the shapes don't look right or the eye isn't drawn to where you want it to go, then you need to change something.

ZHONGLU ZHAO

Artist info



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I live in Shanghai, where I majored in printmaking. After graduating I have been engaged in the game business. I love this career and hope I can create my ultimate job within it.

WORKING PROGRESS



Create a silhouette



Paint with one brush



Asymmetrical alterations



Concept artists should stick to three main hues

Artist showCase



She and I

2011, Photoshop

The idea behind this picture is the relationship between my wife and I. Although the wall has been damaged and the roof is leaking, I hope that no matter what, I will be able to protect this loving environment.



Comfort

2010, Photoshop

In this piece I aimed to create a harmonious atmosphere taking visual inspiration from birds and crocodiles. Instead of presenting two opposites or a frightening monster, they are in coexistence. I wanted to express the themes of love in life in this work.



Syracuse

2010, Photoshop

I painted the scene as a futuristic vision of the city Syracuse. It looks very grand and sturdy, even though it was rendered in a rather relaxed style. I tried some new techniques to create a heavy feeling.



Once I've roughed out the pose and silhouette, I focus on the head and face, where most of us look first. Designing the head, I thought of the movie *The Bride with White Hair*, and the role of Bingbing Li in *The Forbidden Kingdom*. I therefore gave her white hair. The risk is that this can make a character look too old, so think carefully about how you're going to render it. Casting it with yellow or grey will make your character look like they have aged white hair. Casting it with faint notes of blue, platinum or purple makes it look like they naturally have frosty-white hair, keeping them youthful and unusual.

I meticulously painted the Chinese musical instrument, added a ponytail for my figure and she was basically complete.

I gained a lot of inspiration from watching a Victoria's Secret video. I drew two sketches very quickly and chose the one that I felt best conveyed the effect I wanted.

In my early sketches I experimented with making my character's hair accessories look like the tail of a scorpion. This made her look definitely evil, rather than the sense of ambiguity I was aiming for. Once I started to incorporate the fox ears, the scorpion design looked out of place so I removed it. It's important not to fight with an image. If something isn't working, change it! The fox ears became the focus of her accessories; they're what make her face stand out and grab attention. I used a lilac-toned white for her hair, so the eye is automatically drawn from the tips of the ears down to the face.

The design of the clothing was meant to be a combination of loose and tight, flowing and clinging, to really emphasise her sexiness. The sleeves are tight fitting but then flare out, while the skirt skims her body. The exaggerated high heels make her more statuesque. This heightens the perception that she's very slender, giving even more of an impression of an otherworldly, magical character. The overall pattern is moiré, a double-overlaid grid that creates a shimmering look, adding to the magical element.

Materials and light

Strengthen contrast and add detail



Keeping a strict light source in mind, I added realistic shadows onto her chest and collar. In the strongly lit areas I added more detail, and toned down the detail in the dimmer parts. Remember that not every material will reflect light in the same way. Silk, for example, is smooth and transparent, but the reflections on metal are much stronger. I also added a backlight to make the character seem more three dimensional. Finally, I added a hint of texture on the fabric of the sleeves and chest to complete this portion.





I changed this design several times. One thing I added and then removed was a lantern. Fox spirits are often associated with them so I initially placed one on her thigh underneath her sleeve, but quickly decided that it was too eye catching.

I spent time watching a video of models posing for a lingerie company so I had more of a sense of how women move when wearing these kinds of clothes. As I looked at the way the garments fell, I introduced more flowing shapes and asymmetry in order to make the image feel more energetic and elegant.

Most of my effort went into the design, so production methods were relatively simple. I added new techniques into the more complex or improvised parts; some to achieve the shimmering, painterly effect and others just as personal exploration. I've become used to painting with one of Photoshop's preset brushes from start to finish, always with the Wet Edges setting. Using just one brush is good practice as it helps create a more uniform image. Simply change the colour you use, or modify the settings to make the brush effect wetter or drier. Using different layers or modes like Screen or Multiply, or even using the brush as an eraser, can reveal underlying colours, deepen or brighten them. If you're used to using different brushes this can be a hard technique, but with practice you will master it and create some skilled renderings.

I think concept artists should stick to no more than three main hues. This image is magical and otherworldly so makes use of purples, reds and yellows. Other colours should only be used for embellishment. Follow this advice and you'll be creating magical concept art in no time!

● I painted over the original design according to my new sketch to tweak the pose and some of her garments.



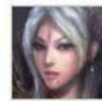
● I felt that the piece needed an overall boost of contrast. I used Photoshop's Curves adjustment for this and began working seriously on the highlights and shadows.



● The effect was beginning to get slightly muddy, so I drew out more details and made further adjustments to the colour tone.

CREATE A CHARACTER

During any creative process, the temptation to give up can be strong. This is often the case if you feel the design is moving too far away from your original concept. If you spend time studying references and styles early on and modify the design at the conceptual stage, you will be much happier with the result and less likely to give up.



Develop the head

How to paint the head from sketch to final render



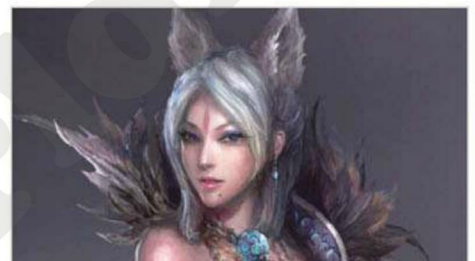
01 Rough sketch I drew a simple silhouette and lines to show her outer contours. The corner of the eyes are tilted, the chin sharp and the hair colour black.



02 Overlay colour I used overlapping to colour, then built another layer for the light source. The hair colour changed to white and her mouth slightly opened.



03 Add details Saturating colours in the lighter parts made highlights and shade more apparent. I also added smoky eyes, a beauty spot and earrings.



04 Modify and complete Adjust proportions, lighting and detail. Her earrings became blue, and the headgear design changed to the fox ears instead.

Retro-inspired sci-fi

Carlos Valenzuela takes you step by step through how to create a retro sci-fi scene from sketch to finish

Marooned on a Deadly Planet

Photoshop

Remember those days when people imagined a tomorrow full of flying cars, shiny star ships and glass-tube cities? All those concepts were created by artists with a vision of wonder, full of creativity and hunger for adventure, and have provided us with an incredible amount of material for this retro-futuristic genre. You may be familiar with classic sci-fi pulp covers from magazines like *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction*, the early *Popular Mechanics* and the books of Ray Bradbury and Isaac Asimov. Countless modern movies have taken artistic influence from these sources too, from *Star Wars* to *Blade Runner*, *John Carter*, *Men in Black* and many more.

You can't deny the power of this genre's influence, even if you look to those times only with nostalgic eyes. This material was clearly the foundation for so much in popular culture that we now see in movies, comics, videogames and books. There are too many fantastic artists who worked in the pulps to touch on them all in this small space, but we can thank them for all the dreams they put on paper for us to appreciate so many years down the line.

Of all of the subjects that were present in those visions, the damsel in distress was always a firm favourite. Beautiful and glamorous ladies in danger, fighting some strange creatures or a mad scientist, was what sold pulp magazines and fiction. Here we will guide you in the process of creating one of these retro visions in glorious black and white. In this form we'll present a humble homage to all the visionary artists that taught us so many things about how our future could have been. +

CARLOS VALENZUELA

Artist info



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I'm a professional
freelance illustrator and
comic-book artist from
Chile. I have worked for
several companies like
Fantasy Flight Games,
SQP Publishing,
Comics Buyer's Guide
and Piranha Bytes
doing illustrations, card-
game art and posters.



WORKING PROGRESS



Step 01, Basic idea



Step 05, Paint over



Step 06, Rim light



Basic shapes

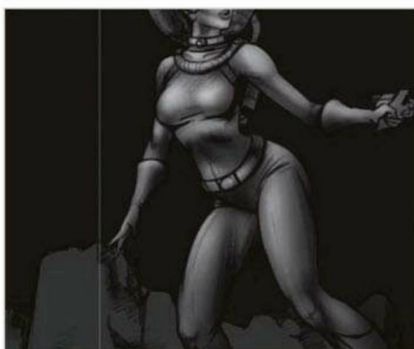
Rough out those iconic Fifties figures



01 Basic idea The overall design and mood were pretty clear from the very beginning: a pulp heroine, after landing on a dangerous planet, is attempting to return to her rocket. Start with the pencils directly in Photoshop. Try not to do a full pencil drawing here, because it will only be painted over later.



03 Shadows This is a very important stage, because at this point we need to determine the light source. For this illustration, place the light at the top right – maybe it's the light from a distant moon? This will help you to start placing the basic shadows on figures and all other elements. Do this by creating a Normal layer below the line art.



04 First lights Once the basic shadows are placed, create another layer, always below the line art but this time starting with some basic lights. Remember that they don't have to be perfect (don't worry about details here), you just need to know clearly where the lights and shadows are.



02 Tones and shapes Once the line art is okay, start with the blocking stage. Create a flat base tone for each element in the scene, from figures to props and background. This helps to separate the shapes and create the basic mood of your piece. Keep the line art at the top of all the other layers.



05 Paint over Once you're happy with all the basic lights and shadows, flatten the layers below your line art. This way it feels more like painting traditionally. The less layers, the better. As we already have a neutral tone on all the elements, paint over the line art with a lighter grey, placing the basic shapes and perfecting the lights you just rendered.

MINIMISE LAYERS

Pulp images were mainly painted in gouache and, later, acrylics – fast-drying mediums that can create thick brushstrokes and soft glazes. Try to use as few layers as possible and paint like you're using real media. This will help achieve an authentic look.



06 Hair Once you're happy with how the face is looking (it's a good idea to start by painting the face, as this part tends to give character and mood to the entire piece), move onto the other important part: the hair. Place a flat, darker grey as the base. We're sticking with the classic dark colouring of many pulp heroines.



07 Light the hair Now that we have a clear tone for the hair, flatten this layer with the background and make some basic highlights with a lighter grey. Paint a few strands and then lighten the tone a bit. Add more strands and lighten the tone again, keeping the source in mind.



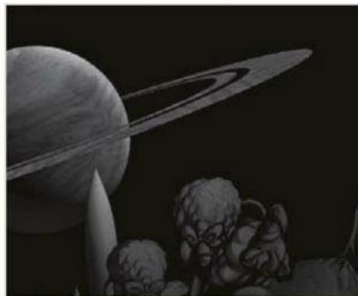
08 Alien creatures Move onto rendering the alien creatures. You can go back to paper, pencil and markers to keep your eyes fresh and experiment with some ideas at this point. The idea for this piece was that they must look like Martians taken from a typical sci-fi movie from the Fifties.

RESEARCH FIFTIES FASHIONS

The heroine's spacesuit isn't based on an actual spacesuit – it's based on a Fifties swimming costume! The design is adapted, lengthened and combined with elements of old-fashioned designs and costumes from Fifties TV sci-fi to create a sassy and retro outfit.



09 Erase the lines Remember that line art layer over everything? Well at this stage you can start erasing part of it, but not all of it. It always looks good when a few lines show through the paint. Erase with an airbrush and the Brush tool set to Pen Pressure.



10 Bring in Saturn The space behind looks a bit empty, so a big Saturn-esque planet is placed there to give some interest. The planet is just a circular shape with a wooden texture inside. Place some radial shadows and lights to give it a 3D look. Make another circular shape for the rings, but distort it with the Transform tool and place it over the first circular shape.



11 Smudge everything To achieve a more painterly look, once all the elements are in place, flatten all the layers and start with the smudging stage using a very textured brush. Smudge some parts more than others, but beware! It's so easy to cross the line and blur everything; work on layers and work carefully.



12 Environment details Some elements, like rocks, terrain and the rocket in this case, need more smudging and tweaks. But important elements like the girl's face, body and the Martians behind her need fewer touches. At this point the image looks a lot more integrated.



13 Apply textures Use a very big textured brush to create rock textures and noise on the ground. Remember that Mars is a desert-like planet, so it needs to look dry and rocky to the viewer. Be careful to paint only in the right place on the image, and not over the girl's body, for example.



14 Light the creatures Now it's time to do some rendering on our skulking Martian characters. Always keeping your light source in mind, start painting some lights to bring out their forms. The sketch of these guys was very loose, so redefine some of the facial and body elements.



Highlights and atmosphere

Render the finishing touches of your alien planet



15 Render the environment Keep painting in highlights, but this time on the background elements, such as the mountains and the rocket. It's easier once you have the base tone and some basic shadows. You just need to use brushstrokes following the shapes and forms of the mountains and the rocks for a natural effect.

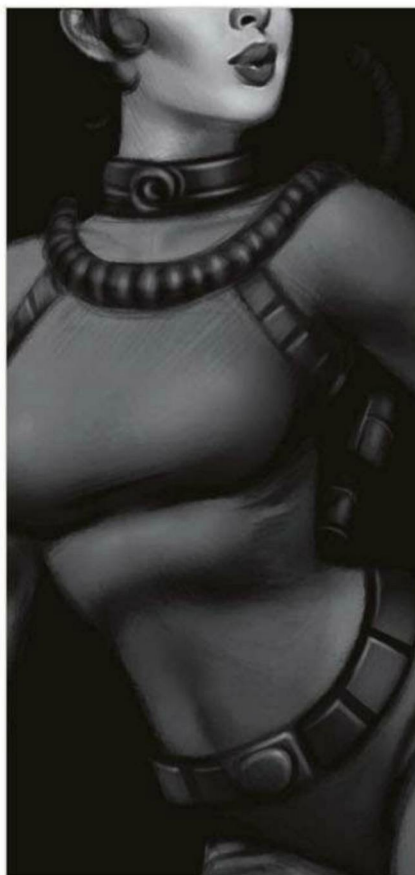


16 Rim light Once you feel happy with the look of the Martians, it is time to assess the rim light (or back light). This helps define the shapes and figures even more, and also to separate foreground elements from the background. Make sure you place it opposite your main light source.



18 Atmosphere and nebulae Now we need to put some effects on our space background. Add some atmosphere on a new layer with a very big, speckled brush, using fluid and long brushstrokes. Don't worry if you paint over some foreground elements, you can always erase after. That's why we work on a separate layer!

17 Detail the suit Now it's time to return to our space heroine. Put some details on the spacesuit and add some props, like her ray gun, holster and belt. Paint some basic light and shine on the metallic elements. The suit is not latex or plastic, though, so it doesn't have to be too shiny.



PLANETARY LIGHT

Look at the footage of the Apollo 11 moon landings of 1969. Notice how stark and shiny the light on the moon is without an atmosphere to diffuse it. To emulate this, use stronger, starker lighting, like our rim light, to suggest the alien atmosphere on Mars.



19 Mystery fog To help give the idea of the Martians lurking in the distance, add a subtle fog, following the same direction of the atmosphere from the previous step. This misty finish integrates all the image elements into one big scene, and helps to create a fluid composition.



20 Final lights and tweaks The final touches are the helmet lights and the stars. The helmet is a bubble with some basic lights and reflections. Once painted, I finish the rim light on our heroine. Her light needs to be brighter than the rim light over the Martians because she's closer to the camera and we want her to stand out the most.

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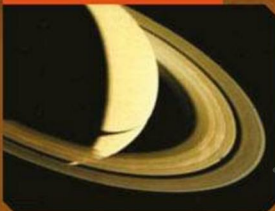


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EXPLORATION



SOLAR SYSTEM



DEEP SPACE



FUTURE TECH



ASTRONOMY



Tutorial

Paint a dragon in flight



WORKING PROGRESS



Step 02, Line art



Step 07, Splash of saturation



Step 12, Highlights

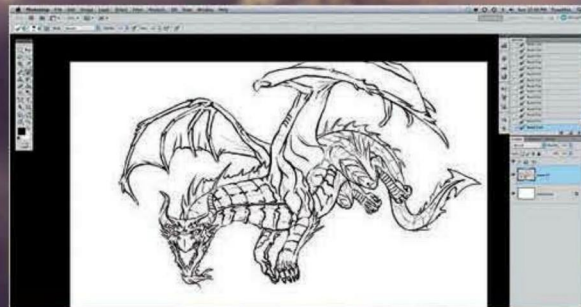


Sunset flight

Set the mood with colour and composition



01 Draft Begin by roughing out poses and the design of your dragon while considering how the wings can portray its mood. Is it tucking its wings in to dive or opening them to casually soar on updrafts? Experiment with how your dragon might look as it flies and find the composition you want.



02 Line art Once you are happy with a design, mature your sketch to line art. Clean up unnecessary areas and refine the line edges. This line art will serve as a guide as you lay down colours on a new layer underneath.

Paint a dragon in flight

Eric Proctor shows you how to paint a fire-breathing dragon flying through sunset-coloured clouds

ERIC PROCTOR

Artist info



tsaoshin.deviantart.com

Eric enjoys bringing the world of fantasy to life through digital painting using Photoshop and ArtRage. His technique and style are a blend of modern methods with roots in traditional oil painting, employing a large colour palette and high saturation.

Into the Storm

Photoshop

Dragons are the kings of mythology and often play a key role in all kinds of fantasy outlets. They can serve as foes, teachers, mounts and companions, and are found in various different forms all across the world. Depending on the culture and folklore, dragons can be benevolent or evil, which often dictates aspects of their physical appearance.

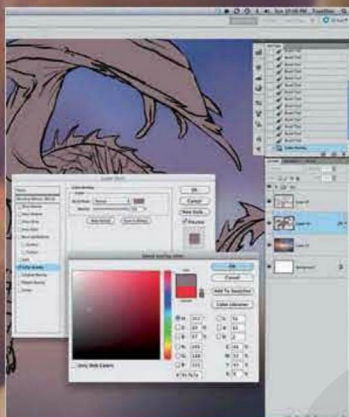
There are two major divisions of dragons; Western and Eastern. Asian dragons are typically serpentine, highly ornamental and associated with water. They can be depicted with long, wingless bodies, antlers, eagle claws and lion faces. The Western dragon is more aggressive and has a heavier body, with a physiology more in common with dinosaurs. These dragons are often adorned with horns,

wings and plated scales, and usually have the ability to breath fire, ice or poison. Within the realms of both Eastern and Western dragons are subsections and cousins, such as the multi-headed hydra and ocean-faring sea serpents. Wyverns are another close dragon relation that appear smaller and are winged but without forearms. Drakes resemble dragons without wings, while lindworms are typically depicted wingless and either bipedal or completely legless.

Since there are no strict rules in dragon design, the opportunity for interpretation is open. When creating a dragon, we can look back to historic references, even prehistoric ones like dinosaurs, while various living animals can also provide anatomical guides as well as tips on posture and movement.

03 Colour palette

Set the mood by choosing a colour palette. This palette contains a lot of rose, amber, violet and blue colours to evoke a sunset. Create a new layer under the line art and block in solid colour for the base of the dragon. This will be your painting layer.



04 Shadow and light Create a clipping mask that is tied with your dragon's colour layer. Now you can quickly block in areas of shadow and highlight, and lay the basic colour down. Keep your brushstrokes loose; details come later. At this stage, it is important to focus on relatively realistic lighting.



CUSTOM BRUSHES

Photoshop's default set of brushes can only take you so far. Experiment with custom brushes that you can either create yourself or find through the resources like deviantART. Stock up with brushes that automate processes like creating fur, grass, snow and even water.

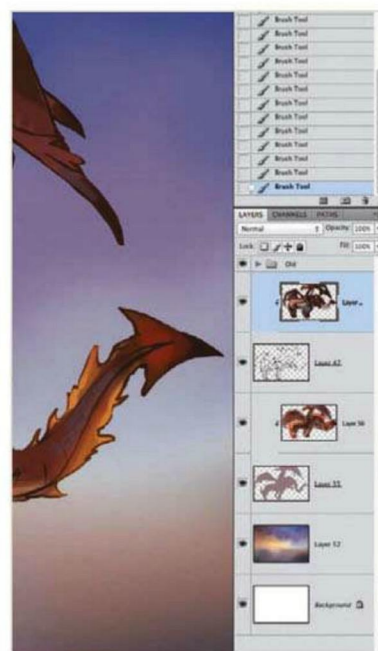


Dramatic lighting

Use saturated hues to evoke sun and fire



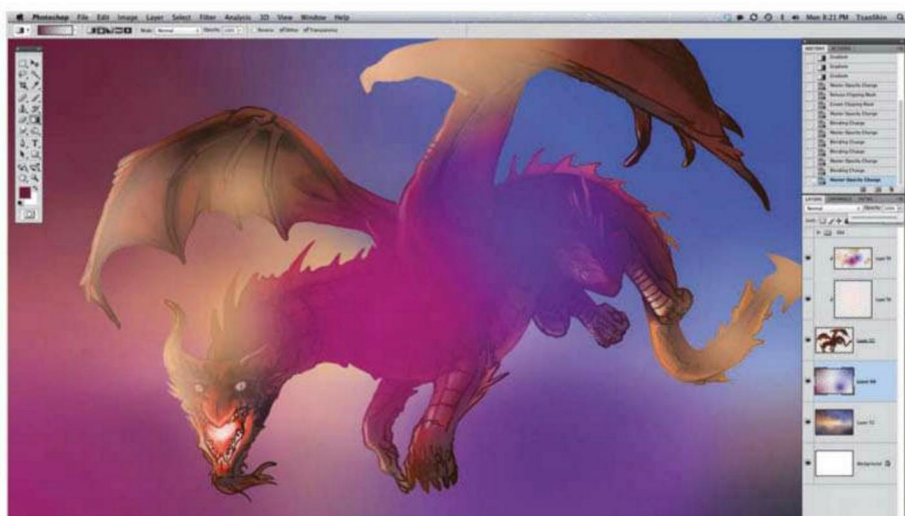
05 Lighting A good way to check on your lighting is to temporarily desaturate your image. Go to Image>Adjustments>Desaturate to take a quick look at your image in shades of grey. This will remove the distraction of colour when you are evaluating your lighting. When you're finished, undo the desaturation and make your adjustments.



06 Colour the line art

Before merging the line art with the colour layer, tone down its hues. Create a new clipping mask linked to the line art layer and bring the colour of the lines closer to the colours of the dragon. This way the edges are more appropriately coloured in areas where they need to be lighter and not black.

07 Splash of saturation Bring the saturation up with vivid washes of colour on a new layer and the blend mode set to Overlay. Do this on the background and on a new clipping layer for the dragon. Either brush in the colour with a large airbrush or use the Gradient tool set to the radial option.

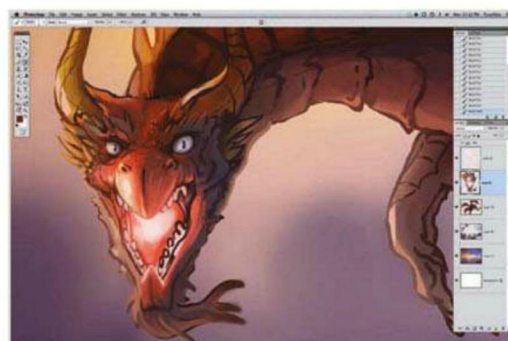


REFERENCES

Check out a local thrift store or second-hand shop for bargain books containing images of wildlife and animals. Children's toys also make great resources in a pinch. Pose a small lizard, dinosaur or alligator toy with dynamic lamp lighting for an instant dragon reference.



08 Blend modes When experimenting with colours on new layer, play around with different blend modes such as Overlay, Soft and Hard Light, Color Dodge and Multiply. The results depend on the colours you are working with, so the interaction can sometimes be surprising. Adjust the opacity for a further level of control.

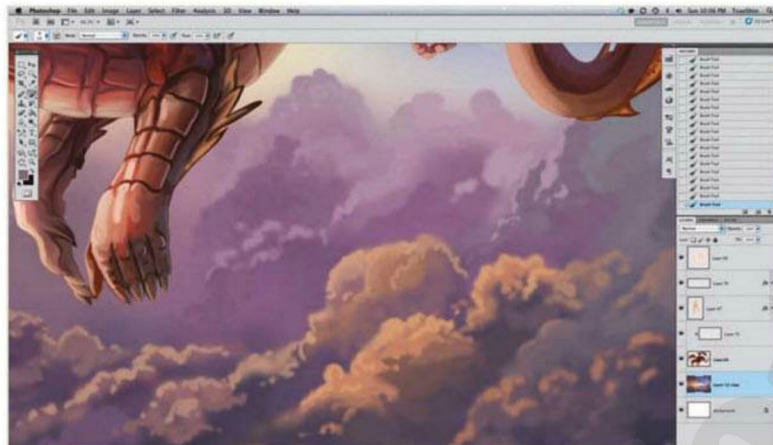


09 Paint When happy with the colours, the line art and the tone, you're ready to paint. Work your colours into the lines using a soft or frayed brush. Make use of the Eyedropper tool (I) to quickly grab colours from around your canvas to save time. The goal is to blend and refine the image by painting details and shaping up your colour blocking.



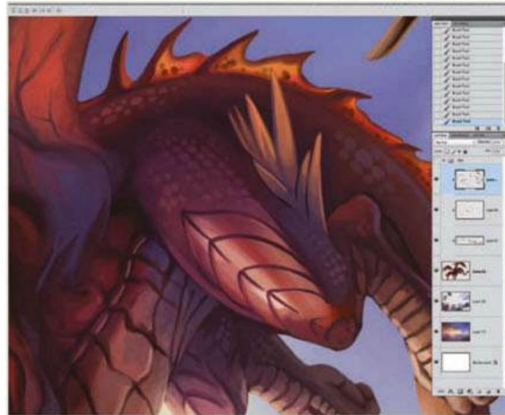
10 Fully rendered Painting and refining often requires the most time, but the result is a fully rendered figure with convincing lighting and detail. At this point, the line art has been folded into the colours of the dragon and the edges closest to the strong light source are in highlight.

12 Highlights Create a new layer above the dragon and set the blend mode to Screen. Brush in areas of highlight along the edges facing your light source. These highlights create a glow that makes the dragon appear to have a hard surface as he is slightly reflective. This also softens the edges and creates the illusion of volumetric light.



14 Clouds Paint clouds using a soft airbrush and circular motions. Bring the colour of your light source to the edges of the clouds with a smaller brush to add detail. Hard edges in clouds will make them look flat, so keep everything loose and fuzzy.

11 Detail Add scales by creating rows of progressively lighter coloured circles. Tablet pen pressure will make this process easier since you can lighten the opacity gradually when drawing the scales in towards areas of shadow. This also works for creating veins in the wings. Start quite heavily near areas of shadow and lift off as you come to areas of light.



13 Fire Use a soft airbrush to make beautiful streams of fire. Refine the shape with the Smudge tool until it appears dynamic and more like realistic flames. The edges should be orange and red, with the centres a brighter yellow and white to show the intense heat. Use a red Outer Glow layer style with the blend mode on Screen. This will make the fire appear richer and deeper.



15 Finishing touches The scene is almost complete and ready for a few finishing touches. Add a flock of birds for scale and a crackling bolt of lightning, then blur the back wing to bring the body into focus and tweak the lighting throughout the image to boost the saturation.

CURVES

Photoshop has a fast lighting adjustment called Curves. Go to Image > Adjustments > Curves and tweak the graph to manipulate the tone and contrast. This utility is one of Photoshop's most flexible and powerful ways to adjust the lighting in your image. This can quickly add depth and make your drawing really come to life.

Create a comics-inspired fight scene

Matt Olson shows you how to build a comic-book style battle in the concrete jungle

Downtown Dilemma

Photoshop, MyPaint



WORKING PROGRESS



Step 03, Realise the layout



Step 10, Freeform inking



Step 19, Add special effects



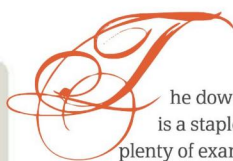
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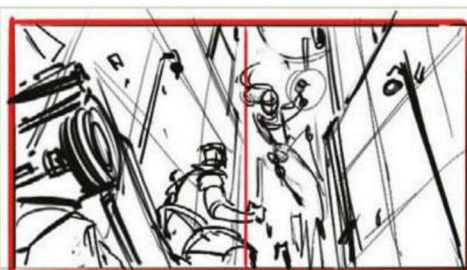
I am a freelance
illustrator and graphic
designer. I have worked
as a concept artist and
worked on several
comics, including my
own *InterGALactic* for
Heavy Metal magazine.



The downtown battle between a hero and villain is a staple of classic comic books. There are plenty of examples of this available spanning decades, eras and styles. Over the next few pages we will show you how to pay homage to some of these classics without directly ripping them off.

The aim of the piece is a bright scene depicting a hero battling a terrible and mysterious sorceress. At the centre of the composition will be a collision of energies from the blast of their hands. You can adapt this layout for your own piece, though, and the most important thing is to have some fun with it.

While this tutorial won't focus too heavily on specific tools, you will get a clear idea of the process from conceiving and sketching through to colour blocking and the final post-process effects. Everyone has different programs and techniques they're fond of, so you will be able to apply the lessons to your preferred workflow. For example, in the inking phase of this project, we will use a freeware program called MyPaint because it has some fantastic tools specifically for inking. Don't hesitate to play around with different techniques and discover your groove – that's half the fun!



01 Thumbnail sketches

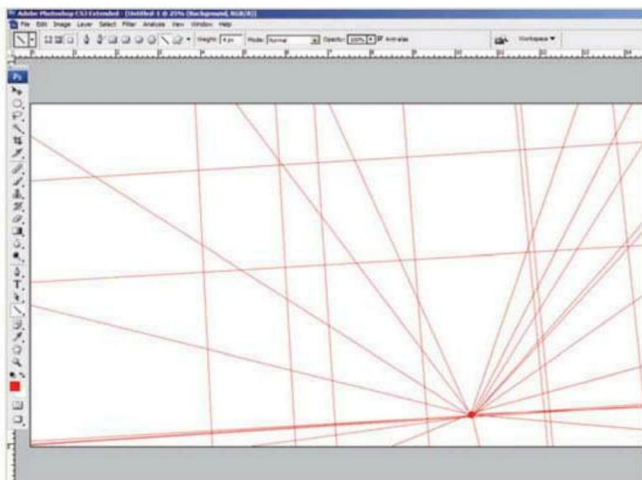
The first thing you need to do is organise your thoughts with a few thumbnail sketches. Even if you think you have the perfect scene in mind, it is best to play with layouts. You can work directly in Photoshop or start out on paper and scan the sketches in.



Sketch and refine your piece

Crack your knuckles and get ready to destroy a city block

02 Choose your favourite Once you've chosen your favourite thumbnail, it's time to create the skeleton of your project. In a fight scene on a downtown street, the most important thing to begin with is perspective. Choose a simple one-point perspective and create a grid in your document.



03 Realise the layout Import your chosen thumbnail into the document and lay it over the grid, changing the opacity of the grid layer to refine the shapes of the buildings. The layout is beginning to come together, but is still very rough, and you can change the linework to a softer colour if you wish.

04 Detailing

Define some of the shapes and details, working up from your thumbnail. It's important for your own benefit to get a better indication of facial features and minor costume details before you go into the inking stage, otherwise you will find yourself having to make changes later when it will require a lot more work.



05 The joy of costumes Make a new layer and use a blue brush to add more details to the costumes. You want to really nail these details before you begin the inking stage. Use the different colours to differentiate the stages in your design, making it easier to edit as you go.



06 Digital nibs The inking tools in MyPaint are impressive and it handles high-resolution files flawlessly, so it is perfect to lay down your first lines. Use whatever program you are comfortable with, though, to achieve the best lines.



07 Render the foreground Carry on working up the detail. The Kabura and PenBrush brushes in MyPaint are particularly good for this part of the process. Render the foreground objects and characters first, concentrating on getting the exact facial expressions that you want.



08 Back to the shop Bring your linework from MyPaint back into Photoshop and create it as a Multiply layer. Now you can begin the arduous task of putting details into the background buildings. MyPaint is excellent for organic brushstrokes, but Photoshop does better with lines and angles.



09 Perspective work Some people like to use 3D software like SketchUp to speed up perspective work, which is an option, but in the case of this image a one-point perspective works perfectly well and isn't too complicated. Sometimes it's best to stick to the basics if you're confident to do so.

CUSTOM SPLATTER

The Splatter brush used in this piece is a custom tip we created. To make your own, paint out a small splatter with a hard black brush. Select it and go to Edit>Define Brush Preset. Once your brush has been made, simply open it up in the Brush palette and tweak settings like Scatter and Size, Opacity or Flow based upon Pen Pressure.

VIGNETTE EFFECT

The dark smoke on the left and the slime on the right create a vignette, framing the image with blurred elements in the extreme foreground. This is a compositional trick to make the viewer feel like they are in the action.

- 10 Freeform inking** Bring the ink layer back into MyPaint. To make it clear that the enemy character is magical, render in some creepy details of faces, hands and eyes around her. Work freeform without a base sketch and have fun with it!



- 11 Don't overdo it** You can overdo the detail work if you aren't careful, and it will look like too many cooks were in the kitchen. To make sure you don't do that, try and stop working just before you want to and zoom out regularly to keep an eye on the overall piece, adhering to the old less is more trope. Now you are ready to bring in colour.



- 12 The benefits of digital** Because everything is on layers, you can make changes at any point in your workflow. You can play with the layout and even the posture of your characters, such as extending the arm further. The solid flat colours are added now. Begin with the foreground solids and group the layers as you go.



- 13 Bring it together** With the solids on the characters and the line art on its own layer above set to Multiply, begin to work in details on the background. Use the Soft and Airbrush settings to paint in some of the colour variation in the flames on the overturned car as a good place to start. Work up through your image, taking it slowly.



Complete the colour

Set your palette of hues and enhance contrast

- 14 Colourful character** To unite the figure of the magical adversary, choose a common colour such as green. Build the palette up with shadows, highlights and a little bit of slime texturing all with this hue. This element wasn't a part of the original sketch but enhances the image.



- 15 Hard edges** Add sharp highlights to the hot metal of the flaming car. To do this, you can use a hard-edged brush instead of the soft variants you used to create the flames. A hard-edged brush is best for high-gloss materials in the scene and you can add strong drop shadows to suggest a bright light source. All of these elements add to the dynamism of the piece.

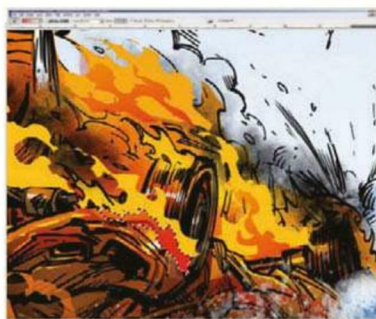




16 Make it gross To create the slimy magic of the evil woman, use a soft brush for drop shadows and darker tones with a hard brush for the glossy highlights. You can also use a Splatter brush for the purple speckles to give it that living-slime look.

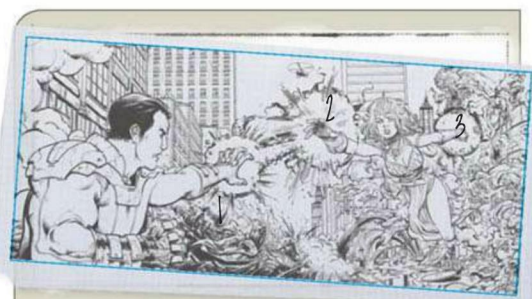
17 Tonal depth

Now bring in more details to the background and the colours of the foreground characters. Make selections using the Lasso tool (L) and then select the Gradient tool (G) to create interesting shading. Keep a cool colour scheme for items in the far distance because cool colours recede, while warmer ones leap forward.



18 Atmosphere Add a layer above everything, naming it Paint, and then use the same techniques with the Lasso tool for the flames. Grab your Splatter brush for the water that is flooding the street from the hydrants. It's all about adding some drama and atmosphere to the scene.

19 Add special effects On a layer set to the Screen blend mode you can create some special effects to enhance the scene. Paint on glows and volumetric lighting, and you can also add some atmospheric depth to the background with further Screen layers set at a lower opacity.



KEY TECHNIQUES



01 Making layer groups is very important in the process of colouring. It makes your edits much easier later on if you wish to tweak colour balance to create depth or control your effects. So long as you have layer groups, useful functions like masks are only a click away.



02 For things like specks on the slime and the water spray, custom brushes in Photoshop are perfect. They can help to speed up the process of rendering and they're easy to make. We created the Splatter brush from a simple painted shape that we selected. Play around with the settings and find what works for you.



03 One of the best things to use in conjunction with layers is Preserve Transparency. It is the first square after Lock: and with it clicked on a layer, you cannot deviate from the present pixels. It is better than making a quick selection because that can cause your pixels to ghost slightly. It is ideal for using gradients on layers without worrying about cleaning up stray pixels.



20 Flatten and finish Step back and look at the final piece, tweaking where you need to. As an optional step, you can flatten them by Ctrl/right-clicking in the Layers palette. Add a slight Gaussian blur and try applying the Add Noise filter too. Take the new layer and set it to 65% Opacity over the whole image to give it an animated feel.

Paint a vampire pin-up

Lili Ibrahim guides you through creating a scene with a pin-up vampire and a dark undertone

The Last Meal

Photoshop



Vampires and their legends have a long and detailed history, making them a joy to research with plenty of information to inspire. Countless films, books, paintings and even songs have been influenced by stories about the undead, so it can feel like creating something truly unique in this area is an impossible task, but don't be deterred!

The vampire myths have a past almost as dark as the fictional creature itself. People have been telling stories about vampires since prehistoric times, but it was not until the 18th Century that they got their name in English and cemented their place as a staple of horror fiction. At this time, people across the world actually believed the stories and started vampire hunting, and sadly a lot of innocent people were killed, accused of being vampires.

Although many would agree that Count Dracula is the most famous fictional vampire of all time (competing with the more recent Cullen family...), we have probably all come across the second stereotype when it comes to vampires. Sexy female vamps, strong women who embody the myth as well as a seductive power are a common trope. Examples of this can be seen in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Interview with the Vampire*, characters from *Blade*, *Vampirella* and the recent *Dark Shadows*.

The character in this step-by-step guide is a sexy female vampire, sitting on a grave as if she's just emerged. Graveyards are commonly seen in combination with vampires thanks to their spooky atmosphere and their associations with death. The girl is accompanied by her trustworthy – but equally evil – cat. Items such as garlic cloves, a cross and a stake can all be found in the painting – further hinting towards the nature of our character. Crosses and garlic are traditionally seen as vampire kryptonite – so this girl is evidently a tough one.

WORKING PROGRESS



Step 04, Values



Step 08, Composition changes



Step 17, Chisel the gravestones

LILI IBRAHIM

Artist info



www.liliibrahim.com

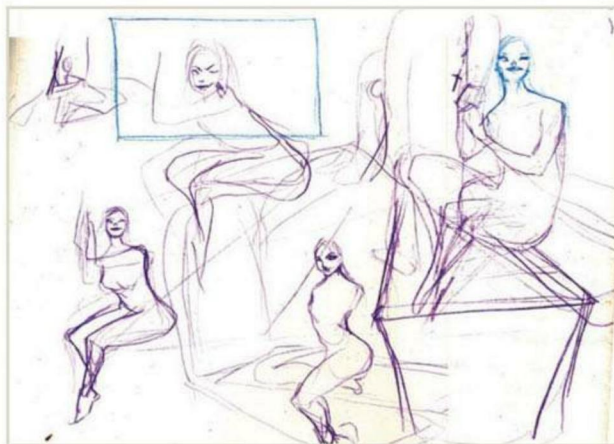
Lili Ibrahim is a freelance concept artist and illustrator working and living in her London apartment. She is a film and games enthusiast who has recently graduated with a degree in illustration and animation, hoping to bring something exciting to the industry.





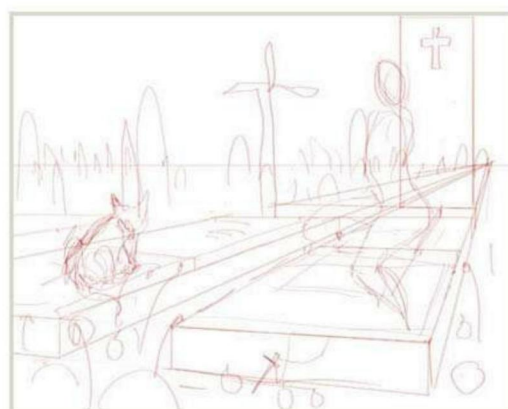
Sketch the scene

Create atmosphere with gruesome details

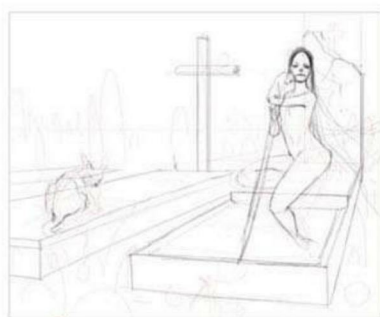


01 Rough ideas

No good painting starts without some planning. Get those ideas down quickly and create a selection of thumbnail compositions and ideas to choose from before you throw yourself into creating the proper artwork.



02 Sketched composition When you have settled on a good idea you can start sketching it out on a bigger scale. This lays the base for your final image, and although it is possible to crop further down the line, it is wise to start working in the dimensions that you want the final piece to have.



03 Clean it up Depending on how loose your sketch is, you may or may not want to clean it up a little for crisper lines. Lower the opacity of the original sketch and draw on top of it on a new layer. Doing this will enable you to look over the lines one more time to make further tweaks and changes.



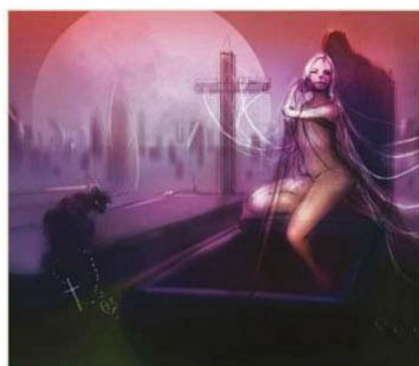
04 Values By working in greyscale you take control of the values at an early stage in your painting process. When doing your value study, it helps to keep in mind that they are affected by perspective and atmosphere. This means that things close to you have stronger contrast, while things further away from you normally have less. The thicker or foggier the air is, the quicker the contrast fades into the background.



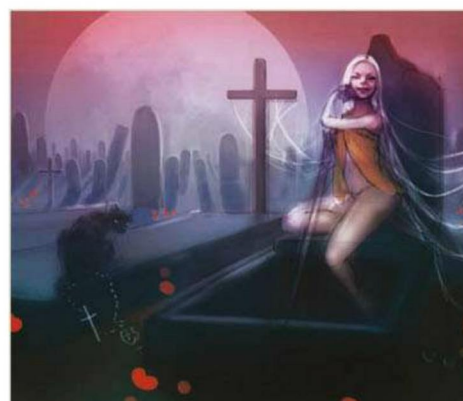
05 Colour palette Choose a colour palette for your piece based on your research and the kind of media that you have been inspired by. Instead of a typical nighttime colour scheme of blues and blacks, for example, you might want to go for warmer tones to give a dreamy, alluring feel.

MIRROR

It can be very useful to keep a mirror on your desk. Sometimes, it is simply easier to pose yourself rather than trying to find a reference image on the internet with the exact stance or angle that you want. Keeping a camera ready is also useful for poses that you can't model and paint at the same time!



06 Tweak the base By now the base for the painting is almost prepared. Spend some time tweaking things that you're not completely satisfied with. For instance, our value study showed up some problems with the tone of her hair – the dark colour was weak. Other details such as the cross necklace and the cat's reflective eyes were too small, so were given a lighter tone to bring them out.



07 Start painting Now you can start painting details. Merge all of your layers into a flat image and paint on a new layer on top of this base. Merge this layer down, too, as soon as you are happy with the changes you have made. Start work on the gravestones and add some placeholders for what will later become flowers.



08 Composition changes

It's never too late to make changes, even if they're relatively big compositional ones. Adjust the posture of your character, for example, if you feel it isn't working. By making the changes on a separate layer, you can always compare it to the old version by toggling it on and off. It will motivate you when you see that your choice to change it paid off.

REPETITION

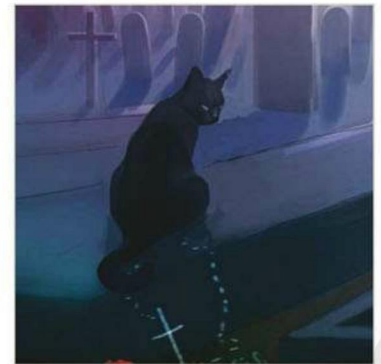
Repetition is a good tool to make something busy but not overwhelming. The gravestones in the background make the environment look complicated and realistic without stealing the viewer's eye away from the focal point.



09 Render the character Where you start rendering your painting is up to you, but any characters are a good place to start. Warm up your vampire's skin tone ever so slightly by painting some warmer colours on a layer set to Hue. Changing colour is tricky when the palette is already settled, so be careful with making too big a change.



10 Paint the flowers Using pictures of poppies as a reference, switch off the layer with the red placeholders and start painting the flowers properly. When painting something you are not familiar with, reference is very important or you risk ending up with a result that is generic and incorrect.



11 The cat Tidy some of the details around the gravestone, defining the cobwebs with a thinner brush and working on the vampire's arm. Render the silhouette of the cat more solidly with a watercolour brush or one set to Wet Edges for a nice effect.



12 Design the hair The original concept for this piece was for the hair to turn into a spider web as it stretched across the scene. Making her hair white is therefore an important aspect. Start painting little webs connecting your vampire lady to the surrounding gravestones.



13 Details on the ground Next to the cat in this composition is a selection of items. When painting little objects on a big canvas, it is easy to get carried away with minor details. Make it a habit to zoom out every once in a while just to remind yourself of how much will actually be seen in the final product. There is no point in wasting time on something that won't be visible!



14 More red details Add more poppies to the background to balance out the ones in the foreground. Add in subtle elements to unite the piece, for example stains of blood on both the cross and garlic, as well as on the girl. Keep this final touch small so as not to distract or overpower.

Tutorial

Paint a vampire pin-up

15 Add to the background The background has been left very minimal in this piece. To make the image feel a bit busier without detracting from the focal point, add a couple of trees. This gives the scene a frame and makes it appear secluded from the outside world.



16 The stake Place the stake into your scene. Keep the colours fairly saturated, as it is a foreground object, and use strong highlights on the fingers of the hand that is holding it. This creates a contrast between the light and dark tones, and draws the eye.

17 Chisel the gravestones To make the gravestones more readable, add plaques at the base and some words behind her. Give the two graves closest to the viewer inscriptions for that added touch of detail. Paint shadows onto the graves in the background as well to show the direction of the moonlight.



18 Final touches Go over the painting one final time and adjust any little things that have been bothering you or that you might not have noticed yet. Add some particles flying in the wind to make the scene feel alive and to give it a more dynamic edge.

19 Use filters When your painting is finished and you are happy with your details, you can add filters to the top. An old paper texture can give a nice quality and a grainy texture can make it feel less painterly. This is also an opportunity for some very final tweaks to overall colour and contrast. Tweak the hues with a Color Balance adjustment layer and the values with Levels.



DON'T LINGER

We all have favourite things to paint, but there is a risk involved with lingering too long on the same part of your painting. Try to continuously move around the painting and paint a little bit of everything at each stage. Zoom out and you will spot something that needs to be worked on. If you finish your favourite parts first, you will lose your motivation to finish the rest.



20 Fangs for the memory One of the most iconic features of vampires is, of course, their fangs. If you or anyone you know has ever worn a brace you'll know that larger-than-normal canines sit in awkward positions in the jaw, much higher and further apart than normal teeth. Use this to emphasise your vamp's grin!



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Tutorial

Concept art for a heroine character



WORKING PROGRESS



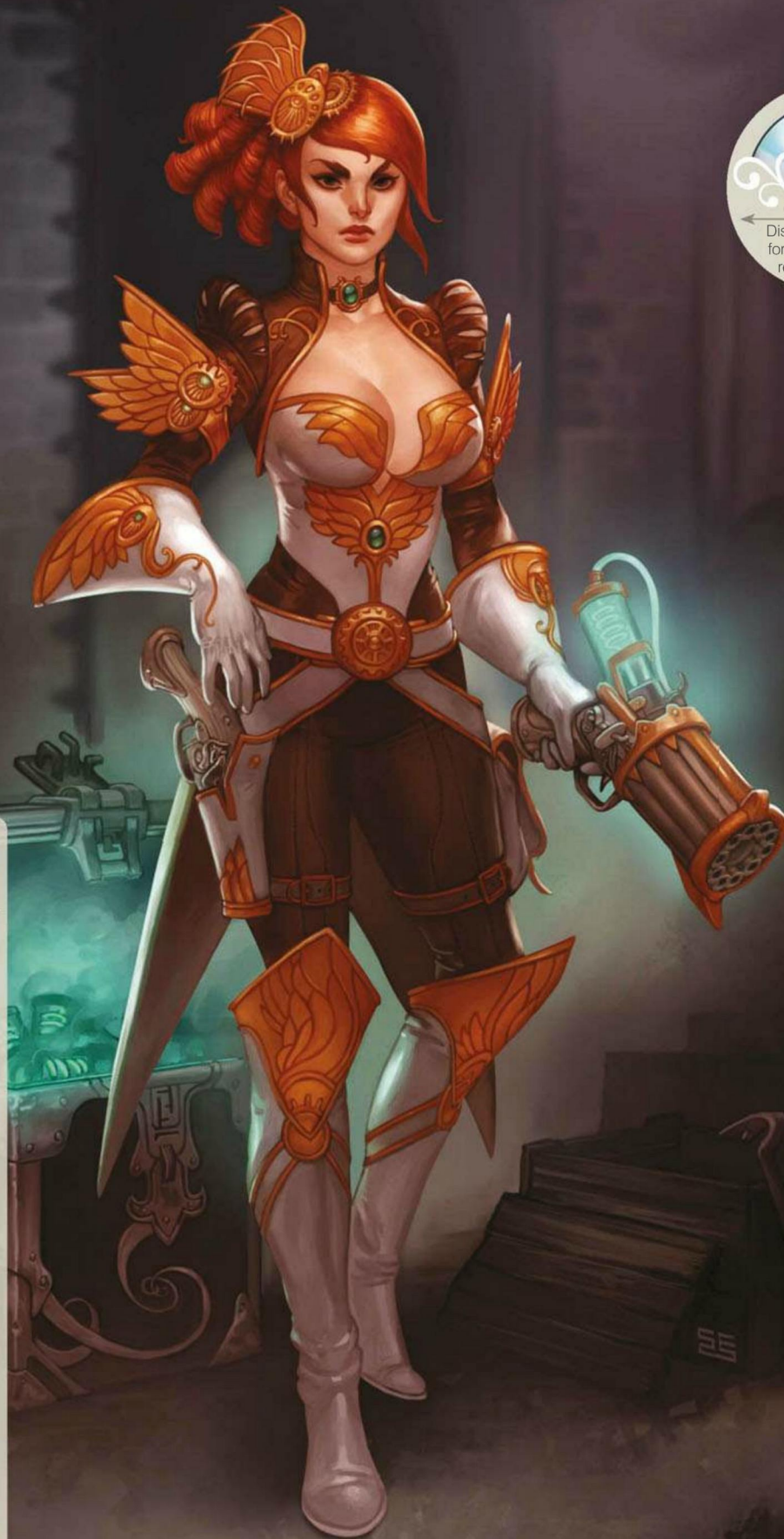
Step 04, Design theme



Step 11, Light in greyscale



Step 14, Render the character



Concept art for a heroine character

**SIMON
ECKERT**

Artist info



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I'm a freelance illustrator and concept artist with a background in graphic design. I live and work in Berlin. My expertise ranges from creating illustrations for board games and role-playing games to graphics for browser games and character concept art for MMOs.

Simon Eckert shows how to find a suitable design and create a rendered painting for a strong and beautiful videogame heroine

Playing with Firepower

Photoshop

If you want to succeed in creating a good design for a female videogame heroine that appeals to all, there are some important aspects to keep in mind. First, she should look strong and capable of dealing with any obstacle. Second, she should be beautiful and sexy, though you should avoid trying to achieve sex appeal through too much naked skin. Strength and capability paired with a beautiful, stern face don't need a chain mail bikini to create a sexy and believable design. Of course, she's still a heroine, so may well possess a superhuman physique or otherworldly beauty.

More important than her physical appearance is that your character has a unique look that makes her memorable and outstanding. That look should primarily be achieved through a distinct and interesting silhouette and via engaging design of her clothes and weapons. The audience must be convinced at first sight that they want to play as that character to draw them into the game.

To create such visual appeal you have to know what the character is about, her role in the story and her skills and function in the game. Another important aspect is that your design isn't too difficult to translate into a 3D model in order to be animated. Thus it shouldn't incorporate too many protruding and detached accessories like flowing ribbons, feathers or long cloaks. The latter are particularly unfavourable for figures mostly seen from the back during the game, as they obscure any shape that might make the character unique.

Key features for the heroine in this piece are as follows; she will be a professional thief or mercenary, hunting treasure and rare artefacts in the catacombs beneath the surface of a steampunk-inspired world. She's tough, agile, ruthless, a little bit flamboyant and of course a radiant beauty. She uses a master-crafted multi-barrelled handgun, which needs to be loaded with power cells. With those key features set, we can start designing.



Design the heroine

Start Photoshop and sharpen your pencils



01 Look at references

Before you start to actually design something, be it in a realistic or fantasy setting, you should look at photo and style references to gain inspiration, knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. For the steampunk setting used in this piece, elements like antique pistols, Victorian-era clothing and jewellery are relevant accessories to the genre.



02 Preliminary sketch

Begin with a digital sketch made in Photoshop, because this way you retain the possibility of making quick changes and don't have to cope with a lot of erasing and smudging in a messy pencil sketch. You can also flip the canvas at any time to check that you have the proportions right which is invaluable. This step is very important as it sets your road map for the entire image.

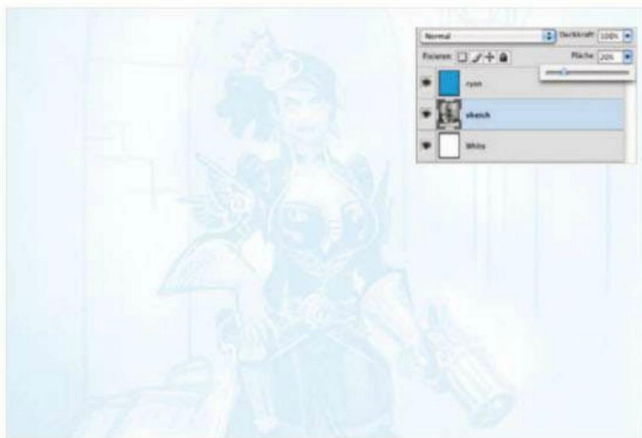
Tutorial

Concept art for a heroine character



03 Create a silhouette Our videogame heroine needs a good and recognisable silhouette that makes her unmistakable. You have to consider the shape from all angles but especially from the back, as the character is most likely to be seen from that perspective while people are playing the game. Forms that are too extreme might be difficult to animate.

05 Colourise your sketch When you've completed your sketch, create a new layer above it in the layer stack, fill it with 100% cyan and set the blending mode to Screen. Now create a new layer under your sketch layer, fill it with white and reduce the opacity of the sketch until it's very light and barely visible. Print your sketch on the drawing paper of your choice. You should now have a light-blue sketch that is ready to be refined by hand.



04 Design theme To give the character a consistent look, you should try to find a theme that's used throughout every part of the design. An overly eclectic look will, in most cases, result in an image that is weaker and less memorable. This piece encompasses a wing theme because it's suitable for making variations for different shapes of the costume and fits her character.



06 Draw the line art Though the digital medium is great for its versatility and is ideal for most colour work, it is a good idea to make a traditional pencil drawing before starting to paint. By using this digital-traditional-digital workflow you are more likely to achieve an individual and dynamic-looking piece. Having the sketch printed in blue will give you a solid basis for a clean pencil drawing of the details.



USING A REFERENCE

The inspiration for the accessory on her head came from a Victorian hairpin. You should never underestimate the power of using references.

07 Final design Now you have to create the real design including all of the intricate elements. Refine the ideas you put down in your preliminary sketch, look at references again if you're unsure about how to draw anything and bear in mind that someone will have to model your design in 3D later.

08 Scan your drawing The final drawing should be scanned at 300dpi (at least) to retain as much information as possible. At this stage, flip the scanned image and correct any flaws in anatomy or proportion.





09 Transparent line art Go to the Channels window in Photoshop and check in which of the three (RGB) the image looks cleanest. Select that one and remove any remnants of the blue print using Image>Adjustments>Levels. Now copy that channel into the other two. Create a selection by clicking on the RGB channel while holding Cmd/Ctrl. Invert that selection (using the shortcut Cmd/Ctrl+Shift+I) and fill it with black on a new layer.



10 Shapes and selections Create a new layer under the line art layer and use the Lasso tool to select the shape of your character. Save the selection (Select>Save Selection) and fill it with grey. In this manner, you can go on selecting and saving the shapes you think could be useful later, for example the main colours of the clothes, to create a complete (if basic) value study.

MARQUEE SELECTIONS

Use the Elliptical Marquee tool to create geometric things like the gun barrels. Such objects need to look correct in regards to perspective or they will not be convincing.



11 Light in greyscale Depict a lighting situation, but be careful not to make it too dark, as all the detail should be readable for later modelling. You can also define the light and dark areas of the costume to create a unique pattern. In the case of this piece, this image of the character has a bit of background, so add backlighting to create a three-dimensional atmosphere.



12 Colour scheme One of the most powerful tools to make your character stand out is to establish and work within a strong colour theme. Try to create a working scheme using only one or two bright key colours and leave the rest unsaturated. Using too many bright hues will quickly result in a chaotic, random and cartoony look.



13 Blend the hues Colourise your image by using blending modes. Start using layers set on Soft Light to define the basic colours and move on to Hard Light to bring out key colours. You can experiment with blending modes but try to avoid an overall look that is too saturated. Merge everything down before you start rendering.

Style School
Art genres in a nutshell

Some classic CG heroines

These classic games heroines demonstrate the visual power of a female protagonist

Male protagonists are common in videogames, but some of the most well-known and loved gaming characters are female. Whether they're the main player character or the driving force behind the story, these three characters demonstrate how an iconic design combined with individual beauty and a sense of personality combine to create memorable and much-loved characters.

Name: Princess Zelda
Game: The Legend of Zelda series

Date: 1986 – present
Games Company: Nintendo

● Named after novelist F Scott Fitzgerald's wife, Princess Zelda has appeared in different incarnations across the *LOZ* series. The classic blonde, blue-eyed elven beauty started out as a princess who needed rescuing and has developed into the brains behind the throne of her kingdom, with sideline careers as a ninja, pirate and even, on occasion, as a goddess.



Name: Samus Aran
Game: Metroid series
Date: 1986 – present
Games Company: Nintendo

● Nintendo's action adventure had a great reveal at the end of the first game in the series, when the exoskeleton-clad protagonist doffed their robotic suit and was revealed to be female. Statuesque Samus Aran is arguably the first female videogame protagonist. Infused with alien DNA and packing a suit that would make Iron Man jealous, her look is based on Kim Basinger.

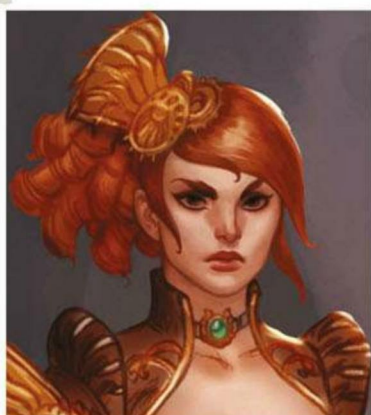


Name: Lara Croft
Game: Tomb Raider series
Date: 1996 – present
Games Company: Eidos, Square Enix

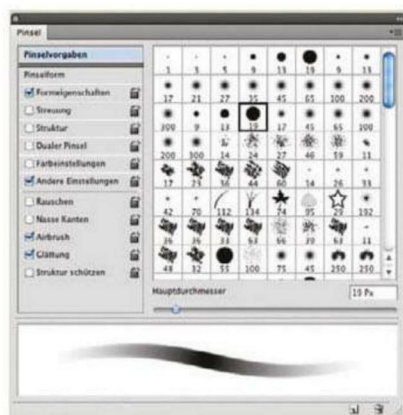
● The curvaceous Brunette Lara Croft was created like a female Indiana Jones. With her luscious looks, she was based on a combination of pop singer Neneh Cherry and comic-book character Tank Girl, designed to counter stereotypically delicate female characters. Angelina Jolie also played her twice on the big screen.

Tutorial

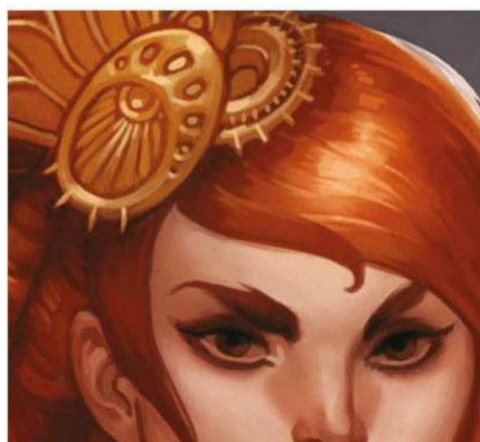
Concept art for a heroine character



14 Render the character Now with all the information set, you can start rendering the image. This is the most time-consuming part, but a fully rendered artwork will make it easier for the modellers to translate your ideas into 3D and is also much more convincing to look at. A poor design with a boring shape and confusing colours won't get better no matter how well it is rendered.



15 Brush techniques Create a new layer over your basic colours. Use the round hard-edged Airbrush tip (with Opacity set to 100%) to render most parts, and the soft-edged Airbrush set on low opacity to smooth down areas where a softer look is wanted. Try to keep your strokes as dynamic as possible in your line art and pick colours from your image, especially the halftones created by the line art over the colour sketch.



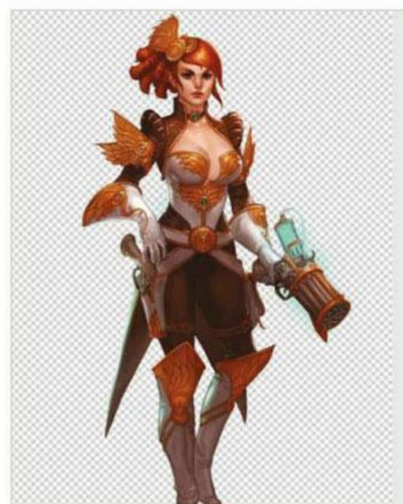
16 Painting surfaces Differentiate between soft and reflective surfaces by painting harder highlights and more contrast into metallic or shiny parts and softer rendering for skin or leather. Avoid using pure white or black – you can always emphasise shadows or highlights later on. When I use custom brushes or textures, they only provide the basis for further painting, as they tend to make the artwork look too digital. Merge everything down again.



17 Select with paths With the main rendering done, we can make a final selection to separate the character from the background and define the final shape. This wasn't done earlier to retain the ability to alter the silhouette until the design is finalised. Use the Pen tool set to Paths to get a smooth look.

18 Clean the outlines

Make a selection from the path, invert it, duplicate the image and delete everything around the character. Invert the selection again and fix any small flaws that you notice on the silhouette. You now should have a smoothly rendered character with transparent background on one layer and a background layer below.



BREAK THE SILHOUETTE

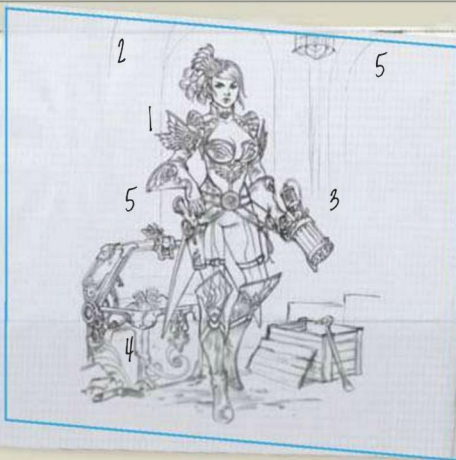
I used the wing design on the armlet as a means to break up the human silhouette and make it more jagged and dangerous looking. Though they are a decorative element, they still don't look like they'd encumber the wearer.

19 Paint the background

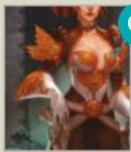
Character concept artists often don't particularly like painting backdrops, but a little bit of scenery can really convey some of the background story and produce a much more finished and elaborate piece, as you can see here. Use the Gaussian Blur filter over your background to add a sense of depth to the image and to also achieve a more realistic in-game look.



20 Finishing touches The last step is to tweak the colour and contrast in your piece. Use a Soft Light layer with a warm colour (at a low opacity) to bring out the heroine against the background, which you can also make darker with Levels.



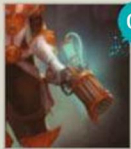
KEY TECHNIQUES



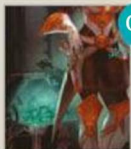
01 Designing details I stuck to the wing theme throughout the design; you can find it on her clothes and even on the pistol holster. Putting thought and effort into such intricate details is something very enjoyable and ultimately leads to a more convincing result.



02 Asymmetry I chose to make her hairstyle asymmetric to make her costume more visually dynamic and to give her a more individual look. Asymmetry can be a very useful way of creating a distinct silhouette.



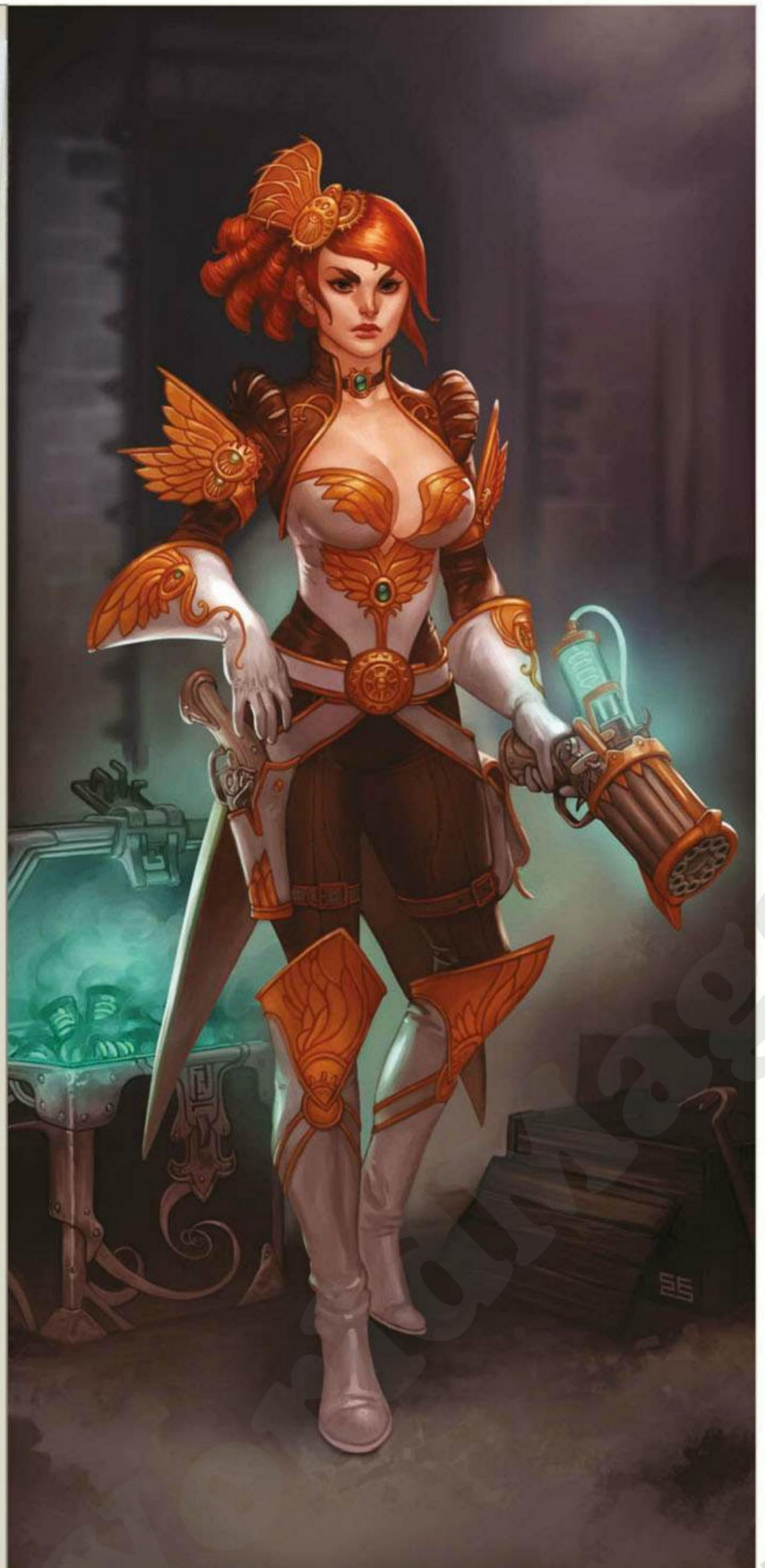
03 Firepower The steampunk setting just screams for a special and unique weapon. Something futuristic and powerful, yet keeping the antique look. When creating the design I drew inspiration from real antique pistols and Gatling guns, and combined them with a fantastical yet functional-looking aspect: the glowing power cells.



04 Dramatic tension Not amused at being disturbed during a successful raid, the heroine is reaching for her gun. I chose to go for a dark background with the eerie greenish light emanating from the power cell to emphasise the tense atmosphere.



05 Drop bad ideas The initial design incorporated a lamp hanging somewhere in the background to provide a source for the backlighting, but when rendering the background it was clear that this didn't work. The lamp simply distracted too much from the character and had to be removed from the scene.



JONATAN
IVERSEN-
EJVE

Artist info



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I am a freelance digital artist from Stockholm, Sweden, specialising in humorous and colourful illustrations and character designs. Besides having a soft spot for fantasy art, I also love drawing silly looking animals.

Anatomy tips for dwarven characters

Jonatan Iversen-Ejve shares his tips on creating character with body type

Dwarf Anatomy

Photoshop



GARDEN

DELVER

WARRIOR

Dwarves, dwarves, dwarves... when it comes to fantasy races, they are a staple of stories we all know so well. Short, stocky characters with huge, bushy beards and hot temperaments who live underground, they are also portrayed as proud warriors, diligent miners and crafty artisans – when they're not having a pint at the local pub. Even though they have set characteristics that you can call upon for artwork, you shouldn't think of the dwarf simply as one stock character. Their looks and personalities can differ vastly from dwarf to dwarf; from the big, burly fighter with his braided beard to the young, beardless kid that just wants everyone to get along but could end up being the unlikely hero of the tale.

Dwarves haven't always been like the ones we typically see in contemporary work. In Victorian times they were prettier and pixie like – more akin to garden

gnomes – before being reimagined by Tolkien and other modern-day authors. However, looking even further back, you can find dwarves in Nordic mythology where they were depicted as mysterious and ingenious blacksmiths, living deep within the mountains. These dwarves were often considered spiteful and evil, and not to be trifled with.

One of the most defining aspects of a dwarf is the beard. Even if there are exceptions, a dwarf isn't really a dwarf without his trademark of oversized facial hair. Even the female dwarf is often said to be bearded, and more or less indistinguishable from their male counterpart. It's also important to keep in mind that you can't really shrink down a human and expect it to look like a dwarf. The dwarf anatomy is squat and rounded with exaggerated limb and head size – and that's exactly how they want to be.

WORKING PROGRESS



Step 01, The sketch



Step 02, Basic colours



Step 03, Highlights



WIZARD

SECRET
HERO

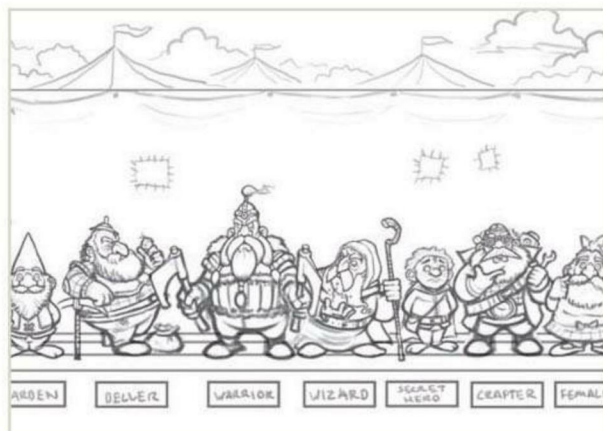
CRAFTER

FEMALE?



Character concepts

Use narrative to establish the design



01 The sketch

The first stage of any illustration should be to sketch the whole thing, with each element on its own layer. When you're creating seven dwarves, even though the look is generic, you can make huge changes by drawing different noses, beards and bodily proportions.



02 Common or garden dwarf

This little fella is based on the Victorian idea of cute, rosy-cheeked garden gnomes. He's fairly small (if not the smallest) and symmetrically posed for the most part. The flowerpot reinforces his role as a garden guardian.

SKETCH PROPERLY

This might seem like a simple thing to most people, but every artist will have had that nightmare experience where you rush a sketch in order to get to the painting stage, only to find out too late that you don't really know what you're doing.



03 Delver This one is a miner or delver. He digs for the precious metals dwarves are famous for. Note his broad shoulders, mining lamp, workmanlike outfit and the jewel he's assessing.



04 Battle dwarf The battle dwarf is the largest of the group, with attributes drawn from Norse armour and barbarian characters. He wields dual axes. Traditionally warrior dwarves are far tougher than their stature suggests, so use his pose and physical stance to hint at this.



05 Wizard The wizard is less physically capable – hence his smaller stature and lack of armour – but he makes up for this with his arcane skills. Show him holding or using magic to make this obvious. Having him standing next to the warrior makes a contrast that reinforces both of their roles.

COPY YOUR FAVOURITE ARTISTS

It's not stealing – it's borrowing! Every artist does it. Try to incorporate things into your own style. For instance, this illustration took influence from Albert Uderzo, the artist of Asterix.



06 Secret hero This one is more of a hobbit-type character and is the typical unlikely hero of an adventure tale. He looks nervous and is shorter than everyone except for the garden gnome. He doesn't have a beard, so he's more youthful – a perfect quest-fantasy character.



07 Crafter This is more of a videogames character. He uses the precious materials that are dug up by the delver to produce amazing artefacts. Suggest this with a slightly steampunk theme – use goggles, jewellery, clock-making equipment and a thoughtful facial expression.



08 Female According to both JRR Tolkien (who was serious) and Terry Pratchett (who wasn't), female dwarves are bearded and virtually indistinguishable from their male counterparts. Play this for comedy value by giving this one a pretty dress and a winsome expression!



09 Basic colours After you're satisfied with the sketch, paint some flat colours on layers beneath the line art to have something to work up from in the later stages. Each character gets their own layer where you can block in their shapes with a basic colour. Any colour will do at this stage.

DIFFERENT LAYERS

Draw each dwarf fully on a separate layer. That way, if you want to change the order of the line-up, you can move each complete one and you don't have to redo the entire piece from the beginning!



10 Specific colours Working on the same blocked-in layers, now it is time to paint more specific colours. Since we made the base in step 9, clicking on the Lock Transparent Pixels option means you can easily colour the layer precisely without having to worry about staying within the shape as you paint. This function will be extremely handy throughout the process.



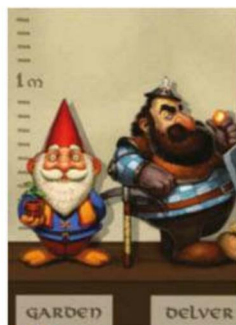
11 Highlights Still working beneath the sketch layer, darken the flat colours a bit and start painting highlights on them. It is preferable to work on a darker base and paint with brighter hues, as a bright base is prone to shine through where you don't want it.



12 Overpaint Now paint over the lines on a new layer. The best tools for this are the Soft Round brush and the Airbrush, as they have a smooth effect compared to other brushes. Focus largely on their heads and faces to have them as a standard for the rest of the rendering process.



13 Background When you have a good grasp of where the characters are going, start detailing their surroundings, making folds in the sheet and painting the trees and clouds. Use subdued values for the background, as you don't want it to distract too much from the dwarves.



14 Overpaint again Now it's time to go through each dwarf and give the rest of the body the same treatment as the face. This is probably the most time-consuming part, as you can spend hours trying to get everything just right. It's important to keep the whole piece in mind and not to get too caught up in the little details.



15 Final touches After you've finished rendering each dwarf, go through the entire illustration again and finish up any final details including the background. In this case the wooden stand they're on, their signs as well as some minor details here and there need to be touched up. The last thing to do is add a couple of adjustment layers to tweak the colour balance.

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Take a look at how Titus Lunter created his Edge of the Earth Photoshop painting



Lighting a fairytale scene

Lighting and colour can be used for many things in art, and they are the perfect ingredient for creating atmosphere in a fairytale-inspired piece

A dreamy, fairytale look is composed of many things, but lighting and the use of colour play a huge role in achieving it. In this image, keeping the overall tone of the image dark while painting the main characters with light tones creates the magical, fairytale mood. This technique tends to evoke a mysterious feel in the picture. The values are mostly in the mid-dark to mid-light range, with the extremes saved for the main focal points and accents. Strong and harsh contrasts would quickly take away the smooth, dreamy feeling, so are avoided in this piece. Mist and fog effects were created with soft brushes to enhance the magical atmosphere.

The use of complementary colours is another important element. Strong orange and a desaturated blue were used to create contrast between the main characters and highlight their elemental dichotomy. Colours in the background are mostly made up of muddy, earthen tones to make the colours of the characters stand out by contrast. The fiery spirits are individual characters with faces reflecting their personalities, but they are tied together as a solid shape to make them resemble a flame that rises towards the top and illuminates the scene. Transparency adds to the effect, making the creatures look like magical phantasms. The transparency of the fiery creatures was achieved by painting them as opaque at first. A few of the elements behind the characters were then rendered over the opaque layer as flat, blurry, simple shapes to suggest them showing through the transparency. There was no need to create transparent layers for each individual character to get the effect; a simple suggestion works just fine. Finally a few touches of glow were added to finish things off.

“Painting the main characters with light tones creates the... fairytale mood”



01 Loose line drawing

I start the image by doing a loose line drawing to establish the gestures and rhythms of the piece. I try to get a continuous flow for the fiery characters that starts at the bottom of the image and continues up, but don't go too crazy with the details.



02 Lay in the base colours

Next I lay in the basic colour scheme, keeping in the midtones. I want to get a base for the forms (with the lights and darks) to see how the colours are working together as a whole. I'm still keeping everything loose and free at this stage.



03 Paint the forms

Now I begin to paint the forms. I try to start with the simplest shapes I can, like spheres and cylinders. The way light falls on a form is easier to figure out if you start general, with nothing to distract, and then work in the finer details as you progress.



The misty moon can suggest a dreamy scene, perhaps a slightly rainy night. Paint around the moon with a large soft brush and a saturated colour.

Glowing transparency makes the figures look like spirits. Paint a dim silhouette on a new layer then define the forms by accentuating the outlines facing the light.

The glowing water fairy is the main character of the picture. You can create this effect by making it the most brightly lit shape surrounded by darks. Make the character self-illuminating by avoiding dark tones and add some glow around him to enhance the magic.

JUKKA RAJANIEMI

Artist info



www.jukka-art.com

I'm a digital artist and an illustrator with seven years of experience working professionally. I started working as a game artist in various studios and just recently decided to try my luck with freelance illustration.



Real-media effects in digital art

Combine scanned textures and brush presets for dynamic artwork

Never try to hide the drawing. For me, art is more about attitude and expression, and in my opinion all the little details in the world can't save sterile or flat work. I've tried to blend techniques I've developed in my traditional work together digitally to create art that is not only fresh but feels familiar as well. Growing up, my biggest influences were movie posters and comic books. With the works of Drew Struzan and Todd McFarlane sitting happily together on my shelf, as well as my mind, I draw from a range of influences.

I use very simple tools; the basic Hard Round, Oil and Airbrush presets that Photoshop comes with. Every now and then I load a conte brush or make my own splatter tips from simple hi-res scans of ink spray. I tend to use a lot of layers, but I apply them as glazes, like I would in real life, allowing the work to dry before continuing (in Photoshop, three layers at 30% Opacity have a more natural look than one at 90%). Also I draw at 600dpi. Crazy I know, but it's the same resolution we scan line art in and has a very similar feel when done. I just scale the height and width of the lines by half at that resolution, then readjust to full size when colouring at 300dpi. Also, Unsharp Mask (Filter>Sharpen>Unsharp Mask) should become your new best friend. I use it once or twice on a layer as I work and it helps keep things from looking too digital.

ROB
DUENAS

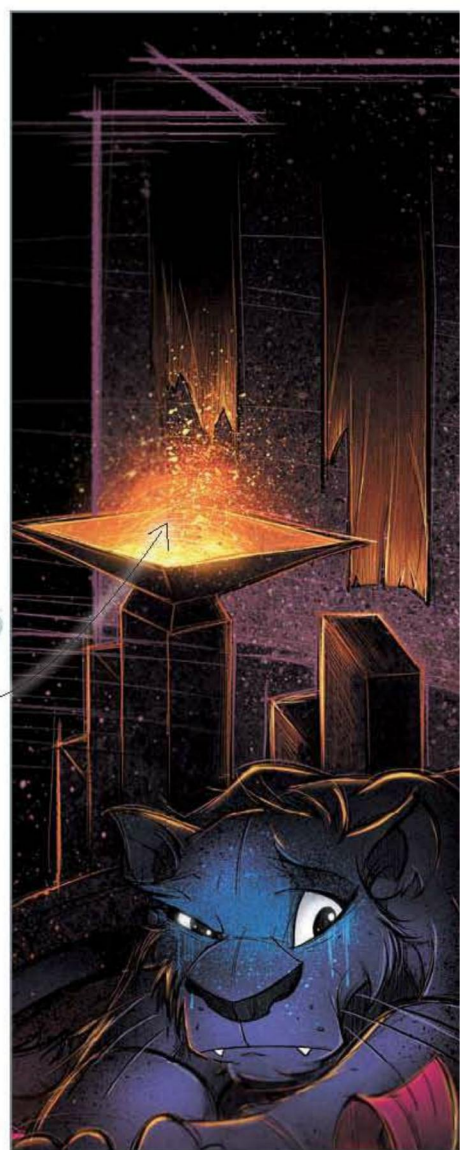
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www.sketchcraft.com

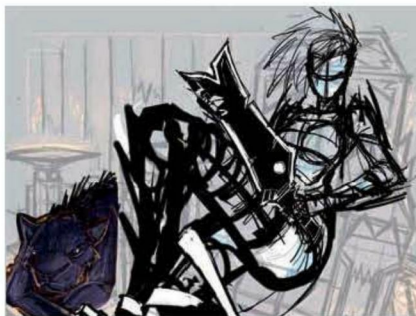
I'm a graphic artist at Mad Engine for licensed men's apparel and I freelance comic-book covers on weekends. I try to keep my digital work grounded in traditional methods. Art is an emotion; I prefer attitude to realism.

These splatters are brushes I made at home, scanning in real inks. I added a lot of little lines, scratches and strokes to give a hand-made feel. I find working with two 40% Opacity layers in Photoshop achieves better results than one 80% layer.



Sketch, brush and texture

From initial thought to final save, all the techniques to creating natural-looking digital art



01 Build, build, build

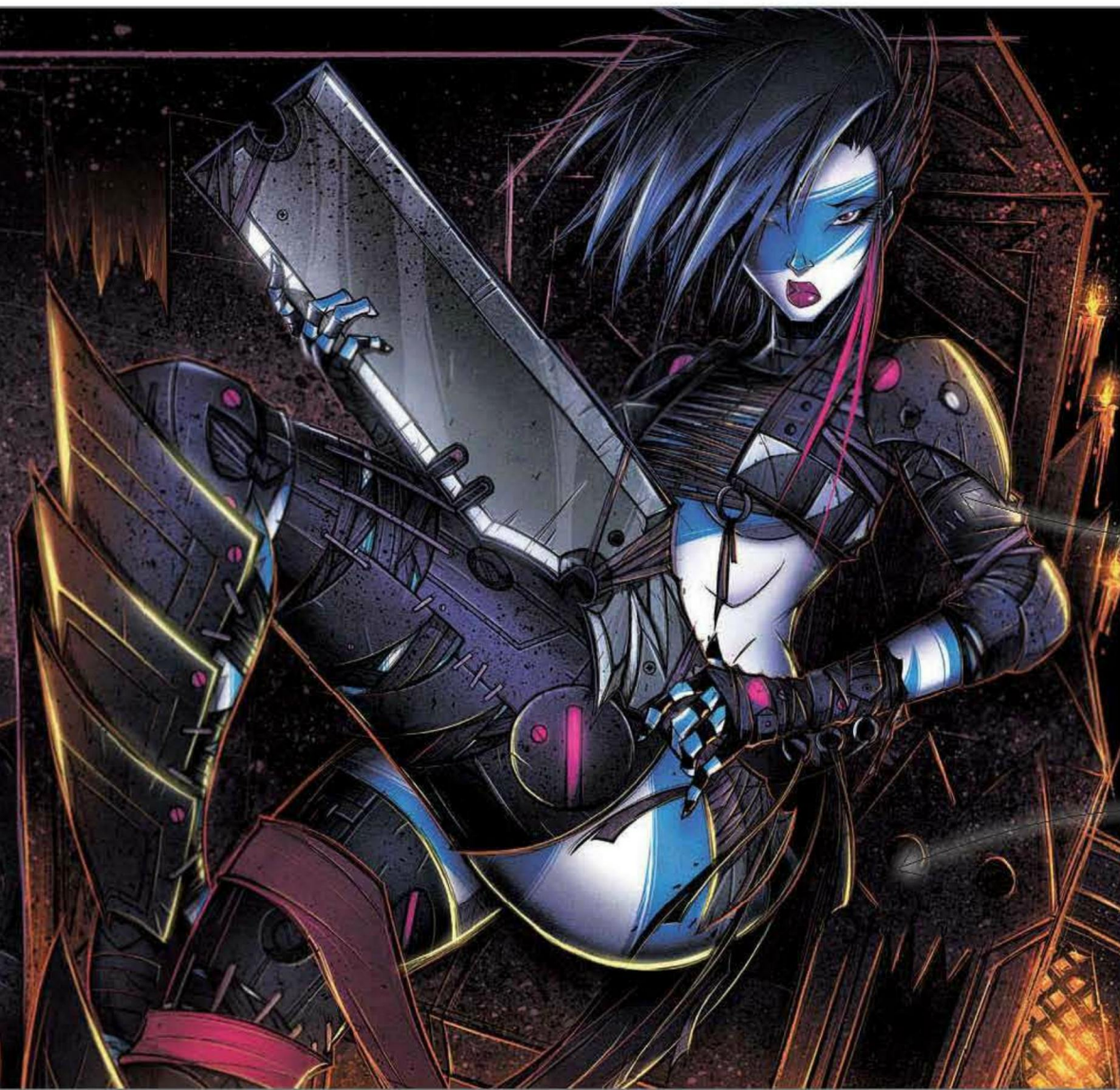
Tracing over the basic colour, I block in the initial construction and costume details in large, bold brushstrokes. It's important that the figures have volume before you start and that you make sure that your shapes pop. I like to draw over silhouettes, so I can quickly block in a shape, turn down the opacity and draw in the details later.



02 Line art time

I drew the basic lines with a 6pt Hard Round brush in Photoshop, going back over with a 20pt Oil brush for the outline. You can be loose with the initial lines, as the width of the Oil brush will fill the gaps. I sketched in the shadows while zoomed in at 50% with a 5pt Hard Round brush and then applied the Unsharp Mask filter twice to make it crisp.

Fantasy Art Skills



In Photoshop I create halftone pencil shades but also use solid blacks. I work with the basic Hard and Oil brushes and use the Unsharp Mask filter to make the lines crisp. I chose to save my splatters for colour, using the early stages to create shadows and costume details first.



I work in colour – a process that I carried over from T-shirt designs to my illustrations.



03 Prime the canvas

This is where I add the initial colour selections and begin to layer the background with various textures and simple overspray. Here I've used some canvas texture I scanned in and a Threshold adjustment (Image>Image Adjustments>Threshold). I selected the lines and pasted them back into my art at 50% Opacity.



04 Dark to light

I tend to start dark, almost black, and then build the light sources up afterwards. I used the Airbrush Soft Round tip combined with a scanned rice paper texture on a Color Burn layer to create realistic shadows. I then added the highlights with hard and conte brushes, tossing a little overspray on top to give the image a sense of energy.



05 Time to shine

And now the fun begins. This is the most natural part of the process, going over and adding all the highlights, hair details and strokes I can. I added a little splatter around the border to throw off the symmetry and black splatter on top of Indigo's armour to give it a little more weight and keep her skin looking smooth. And then it's done!



Create a nature monster

Discover how to turn a simple tree into a writhing demon of the forest

When painting creatures, there are several important things I consider. First, I think about the anatomy and function of the animal in question. I imagine what it would eat, where it would live, and how it would move in real life. This will affect the colour, texture and anatomy of the creature. Next, I think about the shape or silhouette of the beast. I try and use interesting poses and add design elements to the overall shape. These could be horns, ridges of fur, tufts of feathers, tentacles or even spikes and spines.

Mood is a very powerful element when painting creatures. Just by adding a certain lighting situation you can make a creature more majestic or terrifying. I also consider what studies I could do to familiarise myself with the subject and what references I could use to strengthen my design. Doing studies is a great way to build your visual library and to practise drawing fundamentals, but they are most helpful when focused on specific things and applied from memory.

I also work from general to specific, starting with larger forms and saving small details for last. Don't be afraid to be loose and fluid in the beginning – there is always time to tighten and refine. For this creature, I went for a haunted-forest feel. I wanted it to look old and ominous, with elements of the environment brought into the design.

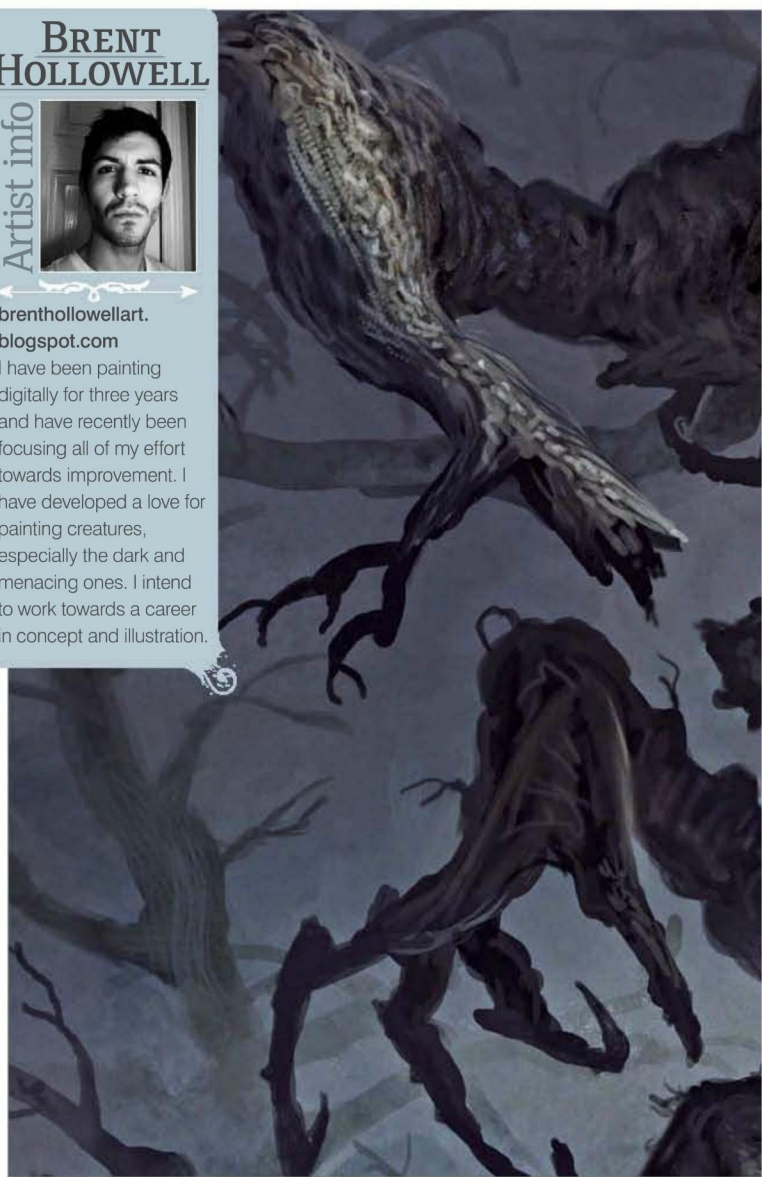
BRENT HOLLOWELL

Artist info



brenthollowellart.blogspot.com

I have been painting digitally for three years and have recently been focusing all of my effort towards improvement. I have developed a love for painting creatures, especially the dark and menacing ones. I intend to work towards a career in concept and illustration.



The process

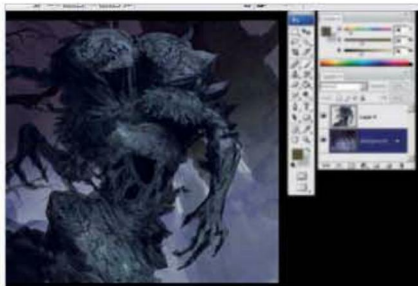
Use Photoshop's Chalk and Spatter brushes to paint a thicket demon



01 Sketches The sketching phase has always been my favourite part of a painting. In this step, I quickly roughed out some ideas of what I wanted my creature to look like. I tried a few poses and used the tree element to my advantage in creating an interesting silhouette. These can be very loose and gestural or fairly complex. You can do as many of these as you like before moving on.



02 The block in After choosing one of the sketches to develop, I placed him in a forest setting and blocked in my basic forms and values. I established a light source to fit the mood I wanted to convey and added a layer of fog to the lower area of the forest to enhance this. I almost always keep my creature or character layer separate from the background as I'm working for easier edits.



03 Base colour I added a base colour to both the creature and the background at this stage. I chose cooler blues and greens to start with, as they complement the mood of a deep, haunted forest, giving a strong and powerful impression of fear and darkness. I fleshed out the creature and the trees closest to him and added in a little texture using a custom Photoshop brush and the Chalk variant.



04 Light and texture I added some warm, natural colours to the areas that would be exposed to the light, keeping the cool colours in the shadow areas. I continued to add texture to these areas as well with the Brush tool. Doing this will create a strong focal point in your piece. Make sure that you try to keep the overall form and direction of the light source in mind when adding the texture.



05 The details Moving on to the small details, I zoomed in to specific areas to tighten. Saving the most detail for the areas of interest is something I like to do, as adding small detail everywhere can take away from the impact of the painting. I focused mainly on the lighter areas of the face and shoulders, because this is where I wanted the viewer's eye to be primarily drawn.



ANGRY/AGGRESSIVE

Anger is easy to portray and you can use all kinds of tricks to heighten the emotion. The chibi girl is furious, you can see it in her eyes. They are no longer large and friendly, but are contracted and red with fury. She even has dark circles under her eyes, and her hair is flying in rage! The woman is also angry, but instead of outright aggression, she looks more threatened and hurt, she is pulling away and her eyes are also smaller but a lot more piercing. Both their faces are redder than usual – a clear sign of danger!



EXCITED/SURPRISED

Surprise and excitement is basically another kind of happiness. There is a little bit of curiosity in the expressions, too, for example the chibi girl has her mouth open wide in eagerness and her head cocked to one side. The woman is also curious, her eyebrow is raised and her mouth is open a little, perhaps to ask a question. Posture is very important in determining their expressions as well.



HAPPY/LAUGHING

When the chibi girl is amused her eyes are closed and her mouth wide open in unrestrained laughter. Her eyebrows are up high, which makes her seem even cuter and more childish. The woman is more demure in her mirth. Her eyes are wide and bright, but she is still quite restrained. She is having fun in a much more polite manner than the chibi girl.

Master expressions in manga artwork

Learn how to make different manga facial expressions with two very different styles of manga girl

SCHIN LOONG

Artist info



www.schin-art.com

I started drawing pretty girls after watching *Sailor Moon* as a child. Now I work as an illustrator in Las Vegas. I like to make funny faces in the mirror to practise expressions. My cat thinks I'm crazy.

IN LOVE

The chibi girl and the woman react very differently to falling in love. The chibi girl is not at all shy, her eyes immediately fill with a galaxy of sparkles, stars and hearts. Her mouth shrinks, adding even more emphasis to her eyes. Her face however, is beet red because she is infatuated! The woman looks very shy and flirty. She is turning away yet her eyes are romantic and her mouth is turned up into a smile. She is also blushing, which is why she is trying to hide her face.

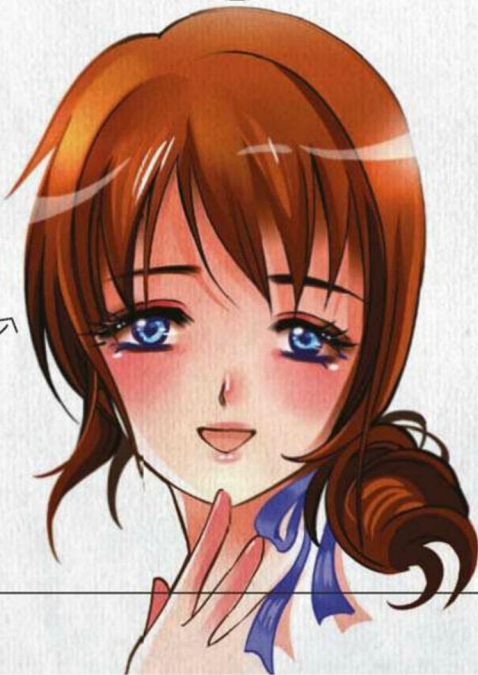


Manga art is full of the different facial expressions needed to tell a story. It is important to be able to portray these successfully in order to effectively communicate the character's feelings. Over the years, manga artists have developed a large arsenal of tips and tricks to show every degree of every emotion needed.

However, not all characters experience the same emotion the same way. Depending on their personality, a woman may express her feelings completely differently from a young girl. In this tutorial, we compare two girls from different age groups and their reactions to the same basic situations. One is a cute chibi girl, very cheerful and outgoing, between five and seven years old. The other is a beautiful mature girl, shyer and quieter, perhaps sixteen. Let's see how their facial characteristics, body language and even colours change according to this simple story.

SAD/CRYING

There are different ways to handle sadness and grief. The chibi girl is inconsolable, her tearful eyes are large and her mouth is even larger as she cries out in sorrow. Even her hair is limp and sad, and all these details add to the overall emotion. The woman is also sad, but in a quieter way. She looks away, her eyes half closed and tearful, and her mouth small. Most importantly, both their eyebrows are turned down; nothing portrays sadness like a down-turned brow.



Mythical characters in Painter

John Malcolm creates this melancholic troll in just five steps

A quick visit to Wikipedia will reveal that a troll is a being from Norse and Scandinavian mythology and folk tales... and not just an annoying person on internet forums. The troll has been picked up by many authors, from Tolkien to Pratchett, and altered to suit their own mythologies and stories. Trolls also appear in many fantasy role-playing games, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, where there are many troll variants, none of whom seem to share their Norse cousin's weakness to direct sunlight.

I was originally going to place my troll character in a cave or a subterranean environment, but the idea of the troll hiding under the bridge took hold of me and I had to go for it. I also didn't want to set my scene too early in the morning or too late at night. My trolls don't like sunlight, but they can put up with limited exposure before bits of their skin start to turn into stone and it's better for the tonal balance of the piece to give it some light. At this time he's probably in as much trouble as a pale-skinned, red-headed Scottish person (like me) on a rare sunny day if he's caught out in the open without shelter – he won't die but it will hurt!

The other details and questions I leave open to the viewer. What's that green thing? Is that a barrel and what's in it? And where did he get those skulls and shields?

Knowing in advance that this would be a hard process to describe in five short steps I decided to capture the whole thing in video form, which I have supplied so you can follow along!

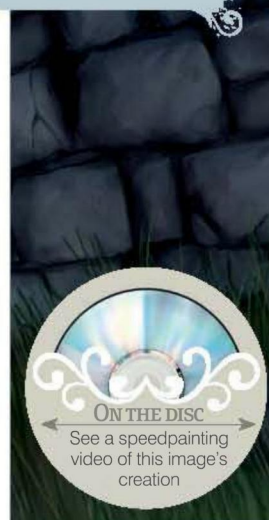
JOHN MALCOLM

Artist info



www.johnmalcolm1970.co.uk

While working full time for a local newspaper group, John has found his free time increasingly being taken up with digital art commissions. He is happiest painting things from scratch using Painter 12 but also likes to play with Blender.



Sketch, colour and blend

Design the figure and environment of your troll



01 The basic sketch

I started by sketching some rough ideas for the composition on paper. The bridge concept suited the troll theme and I used that as the basis for my background. After scanning it in, I built up layers of pencil drawing using Painter's Real 2B Pencil. As I finished each layer I reduced its opacity slightly and then refined things on a new layer over the top.



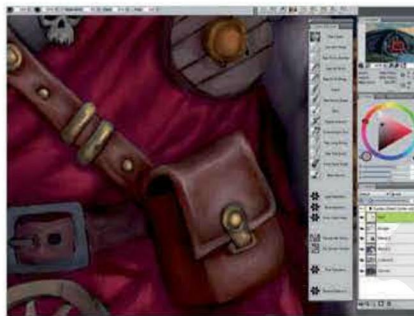
02 Block in colour

On a new layer under the pencil drawing I roughly blocked in areas of local colour using Rob's Basic brush (you can download this for free at www.ethereality.info/ethereality_website/goodies/goodies.htm). I then began adding areas of darker and lighter tones based on samples from the underlying image and did some basic blending.



03 Blend the tones

On a new layer above the colour and pencil, I began blending. At this stage I used the Just Add Water blender in Painter a lot. I used it to blend, to push areas of colour into shape and to slowly integrate the lines from the pencil layer. I then went back to the Real 2B Pencil to add more detail and reinforce areas before blending again.



04 Tidy up

This step and the previous one were repeated many times before I began to finalise the image, as you get the best effect by building up layers of colour and blending. The blending process and sketched elements required tidying up all over the image when I was finished with the colour. I moved from one area to another, just working as it caught my eye.



05 Final details

After many messy hours looping through stages three and four, I took a break and stopped looking at the image for a while. After returning, I added lots of little details and fiddly bits. Elements like the beard hairs, the slight glow of light coming through the ear, the mysterious green orb and the grass finished off the troll character and the story.

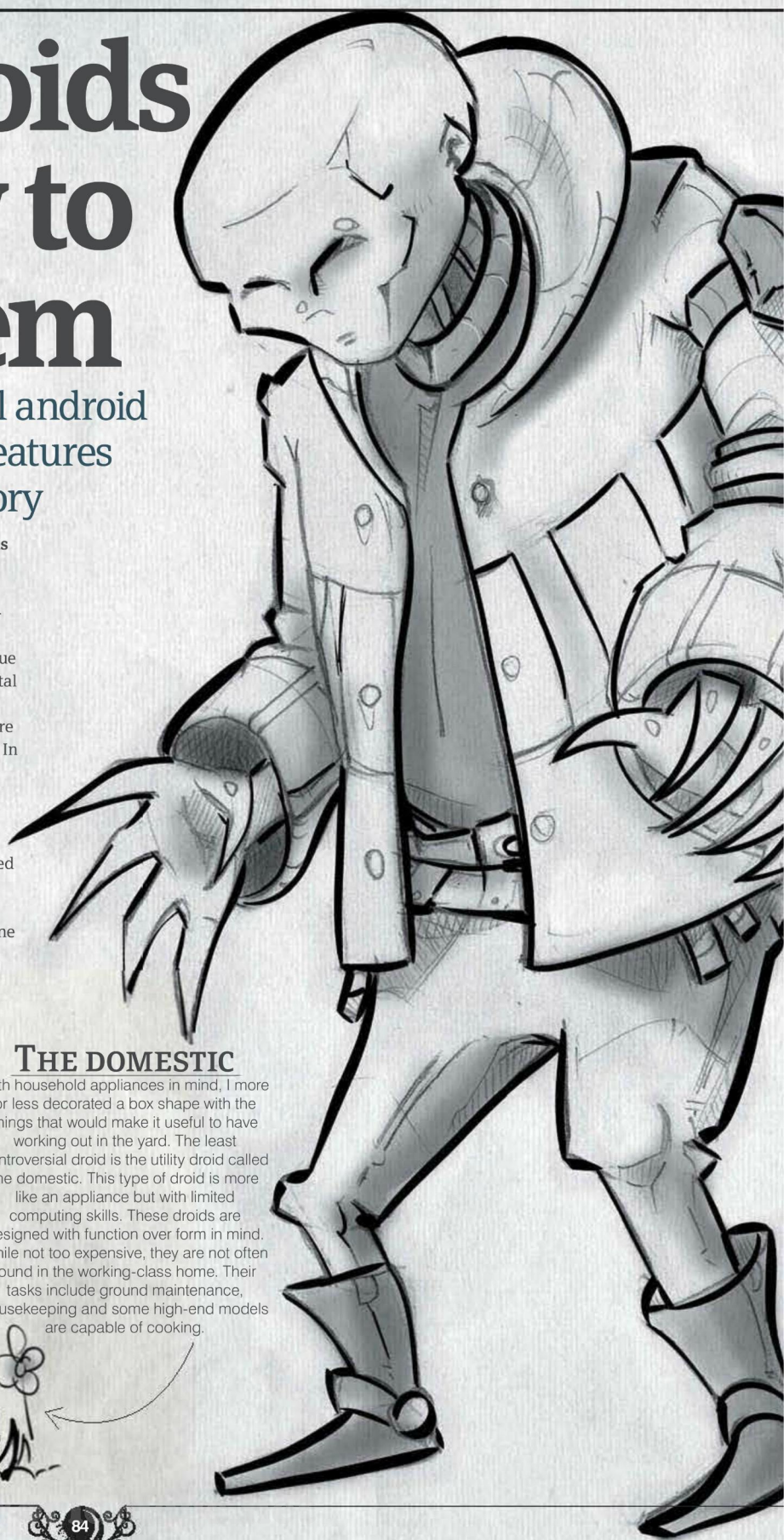


Basic droids and how to draw them

Be inspired to create original android characters, designing their features according to function and story

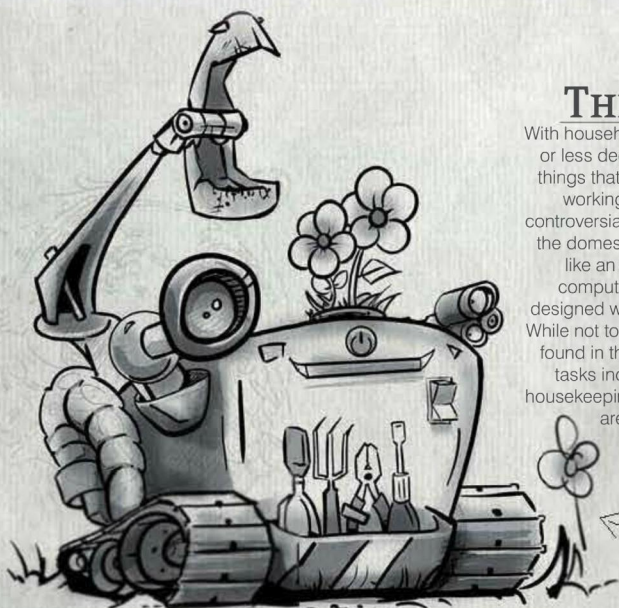
In the mind of the science-fiction enthusiast, the android holds a special place. Drawing androids is simply a matter of putting interesting geometric shapes together and mixing and matching them with a natural form. Inspiration can be found from science-fiction books and magazines, but also looking at current technology. I have often found myself striving for perfect technique and completely neglecting the idea process. Good technique is vital for any piece, but finding inspiration is equally important.

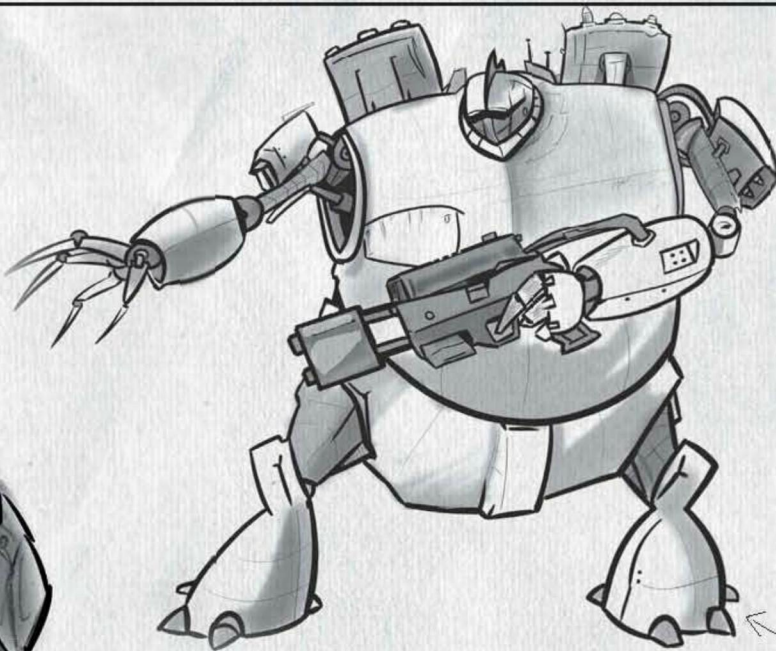
Here I have drawn up some basic droid types that most of us are familiar with, with much of their design based on their function. In the beginning I work fast and draw a lot of small thumbnails. I then look back at my drawings to see which shapes I find most interesting and develop those. The details will come, but I'm not too quick to focus on them. The drawings here are at a stage where they are not fully developed and all the details are not filled in, but they are ready to go to the next step. I like to complete the figures by thinking how they fit with the story. I have detailed some of the narrative here, so you can build off of what I have done or use it to fuel your own imagination and get drawing.



THE DOMESTIC

With household appliances in mind, I more or less decorated a box shape with the things that would make it useful to have working out in the yard. The least controversial droid is the utility droid called the domestic. This type of droid is more like an appliance but with limited computing skills. These droids are designed with function over form in mind. While not too expensive, they are not often found in the working-class home. Their tasks include ground maintenance, housekeeping and some high-end models are capable of cooking.





THE REPLICANT

A large upper body and small legs are the main features of this design, and they were the two masses that I drew in first. From there I detailed the hands, the feet and the smaller elements like the belt and things hanging from under the jacket. Androids or replicants of this type are used only by government institutions. Because they are very human like in both their appearance and ability to think, replicants are given some sort of nonhuman feature to make them identifiable and appease the anti-android groups.

Covert droids are the exception to this rule. They have been known to seek their freedom and live among humans secretly, often being forced into criminal circles by the very nature of their illegal status. Generally programmed with combat applications in mind they make very deadly hit men, bodyguards and all-round thugs.

MECH DROID

I wanted this guy to look big so I shrunk down his head and put it on a large, stocky body. Using a basic humanoid form, I extended out the arms and legs in a stance that would evoke thoughts of getting ready for a fight. In uncertain times, solid military technology is a must. These heavies, as they are called, are fully capable of working on the front lines individually or as teams without the need to put human troops in harm's way. With extendable appendages and the latest in armour and firepower technology, the heavies have an unmatched advantage on any terrain. Also capable of linking up with GPS satellites, it is virtually impossible for the bad guys to hide or postpone their inevitable defeat.

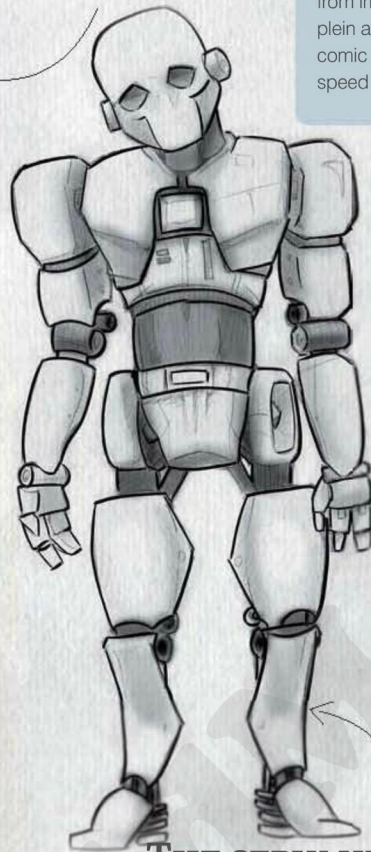
EDWARD "JOEL" WITTLIF

Artist info



paperbag-ninja.
deviantart.com

I am a self-taught digital artist living in Colorado. I have a strong background and formal training in traditional art. My interests in art vary from impressionistic plein air painting to comic art and speed painting.



THE SERVANT

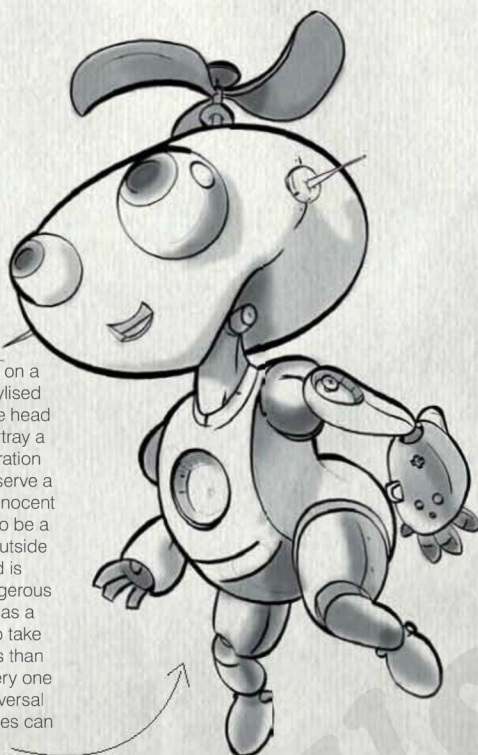
For this drawing I focused on the main masses of the human body. I drew boxed out forms of each body part, such as the rib cage, upper and lower arms and the sections of the leg, separating them by thin joint areas where I tried to show some detail of the mechanics inside.

Androids of this type are available to the public and come in many different models with standard features including customisable body panelling and wireless controls. However, many anti-android groups oppose them out of fear of science-fiction prophecies coming true.

Legislation has been passed limiting battery life to seven years. Batteries can only be replaced at certified government facilities. Also, droids are not allowed to take on lifelike facial features or impersonate a human in any way. Androids with two arms and two legs are still highly controversial.

TOY DROID

A boy's best friend, I worked on a figure that would have the stylised proportions of a child – a large head on a small body. I tried to portray a look of innocence and exploration through the eyes. These toys serve a multitude of functions. While innocent and entertaining, they can also be a great way to let the kids get outside without worry. This android is sensitive to suspicious or dangerous activity and will not only act as a perfect playmate but will also take preventative measures in less than ideal circumstances. Also, every one comes with a detachable universal game controller so the little ones can get out and play.



Magical anthro figures

Throw in human and animal elements with some magic for a fantastical character

When approaching an anthro character – that is, one that combines human elements with animal features in one body – make sure you study the animal first. Learning about anatomy is an on-going task that takes years to master. Here I've combined an owl with a human. The owl features can be found in the head, the feathers and claws, but the anatomy of the body looks human. This is the usual way for an anthro creature.

All skeletal creatures, including humans, have a very similar anatomy. A giraffe, a human, a wolf, you name it; they may look massively different but they all have an even number of pairs of ribs, vertebrae, a skull, articulated limbs and a backbone.

The main difference is the size and shape of these bones, how they are placed and where the muscles sit as a result of these differences. Whenever you apply something animal to the human anatomy, you have to know where the animal bones end and the human bones start, even if it's just for personal reference. You need to know these rules in order to know when to break them.

You want your viewers to understand this creature, that's why it's important to know a few things about the depiction of body language. The body language of animals is far different to that of humans and will not always translate visually. Presuming they are humanoid, human body language is the one to use as it is the one that people looking at the piece will understand.

Magic is something that by its very nature looks unusual and mysterious. No one can cast electric beams from their arms without technology, so we know we're dealing with a supernatural entity here! Features that can add to the magical atmosphere are touches like sparkles and fog. Elements like water or wind can also be used instead of lighting.

“Whenever you apply something animal to the human anatomy, you have to know where the animal bones end and the human bones start... for reference”



SUZANNE HELMIGH

Artist info



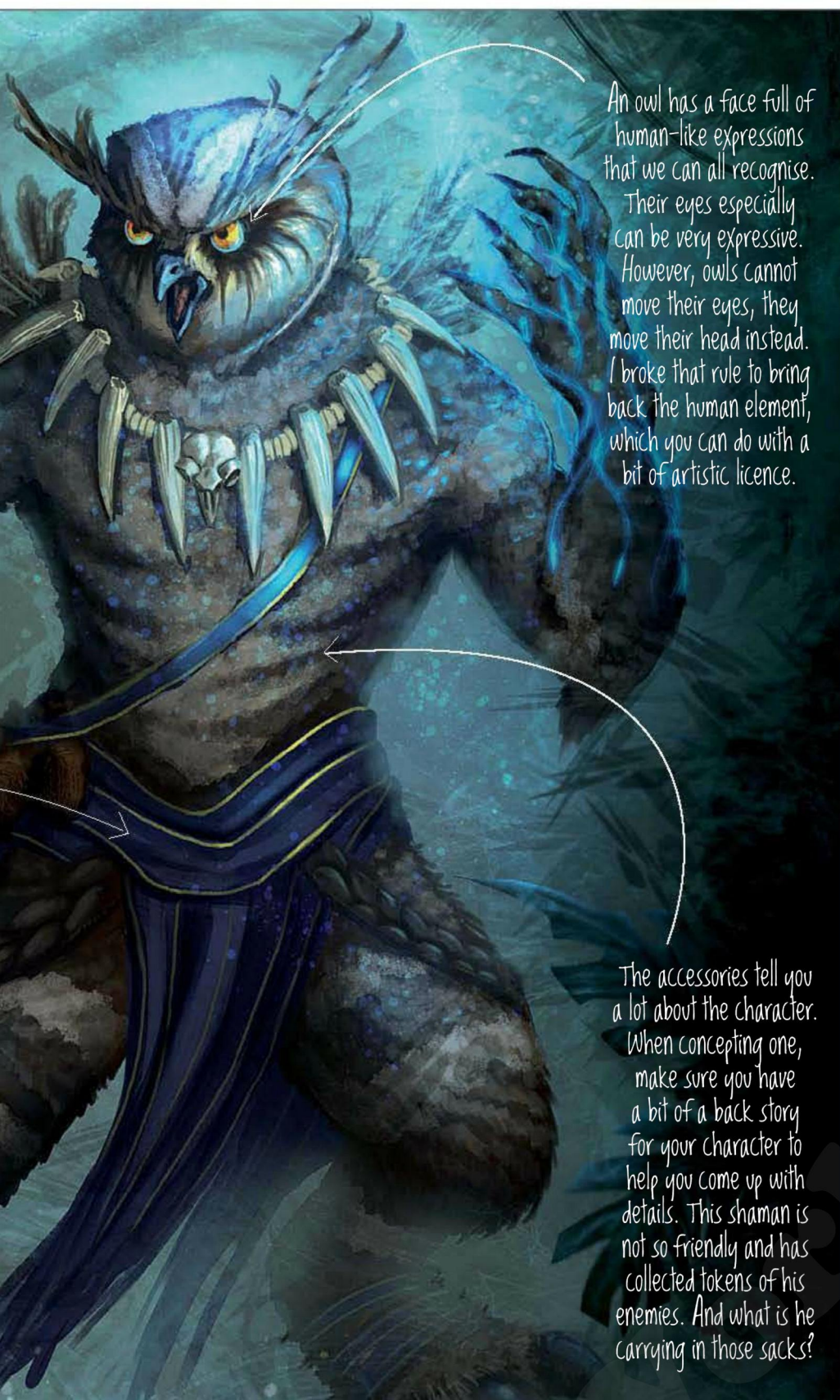
www.helmighs.com

Fantasy worlds and their inhabitants are my favourite subjects to paint, sometimes as concept art, other times as illustrations for card games or books.

Whenever I get some free time, I meet up with others for life drawing in museums or zoos.

This is an open pose. He is not afraid of being hit because he knows he is faster than any enemy. Broad shoulders and a straight body show pride and power. Don't hesitate to get out your camera and try out some poses yourself. The uneven ground creates more options for stance, too.

Fantasy Art Skills



An owl has a face full of human-like expressions that we can all recognise.

Their eyes especially can be very expressive. However, owls cannot move their eyes, they move their head instead. I broke that rule to bring back the human element, which you can do with a bit of artistic licence.

The accessories tell you a lot about the character. When conceiving one, make sure you have a bit of a back story for your character to help you come up with details. This shaman is not so friendly and has collected tokens of his enemies. And what is he carrying in those sacks?



01 Shape and rest Make a sketch in black and white to experiment a bit. Think of composition and placement. This piece is about the character so make sure that the environment does not distract. Leaves and branches can be used as guidelines. Think about a storyline and characteristics to determine his or her pose. Make the line art and the colour shading on different layers.



02 Bring in the colour tones Start a new file, copy and paste the line art and make a gradient background. Create a new layer under the line art and one on top. Use the bottom one to fill in the base colours and then the top layer to define the character. Once the colours are established, create a new layer set to Darken or Multiply and use a soft brush to darken all the edges to create depth.



03 Magical lighting The Color Dodge and Linear Dodge (Add) blend modes should be your new best friends. Use them in combination with your custom-made brushes to make sparkles and fog. Every material responds differently to light; light objects reflect the lighting colour but dark ones won't. Use a soft brush at 60% Opacity to create bounce light, and play with textured tips to finish.

Poses for superheroes

Transform your characters into comic protagonists with a range of dynamic poses

It only takes a few tricks of perspective and poise to separate a regular drawn figure from one that looks like a superhero. But what are these elements that will help distinguish the normal characters from the truly super ones?

First we must understand that these elements are clear visual indicators and help to transform a simple human being into a valiant fighter, giving him additional character, personality and greatness. Generally speaking, these elements are the muscles, pose and the frame's perspective.

In the classical culture of western comics, superheroes – both male and female – often have a muscle structure that is highly developed, sometimes even exaggerated, compared to normal figures. This gives us a clear idea of their physical strength and, at the same time, tells us that these muscular people are not ones to shy away from a good old melee. The size of their bodies, too, is often larger in order to make them look taller and mightier.

The pose is key to making these bodily proportions work, and superheroes are presented as much more sinuous and statuesque than regular characters. Traditionally they are drawn with their chest out, chin up and looking proud. This gives them a sense of superiority and invincibility, and conveys the idea of strength and confidence. The frame's perspective is also crucial for achieving this sense of power and grandeur. The best framing is from a view that looks upwards from below, as this will give your character a sense of being, symbolically speaking, the highest and most powerful.

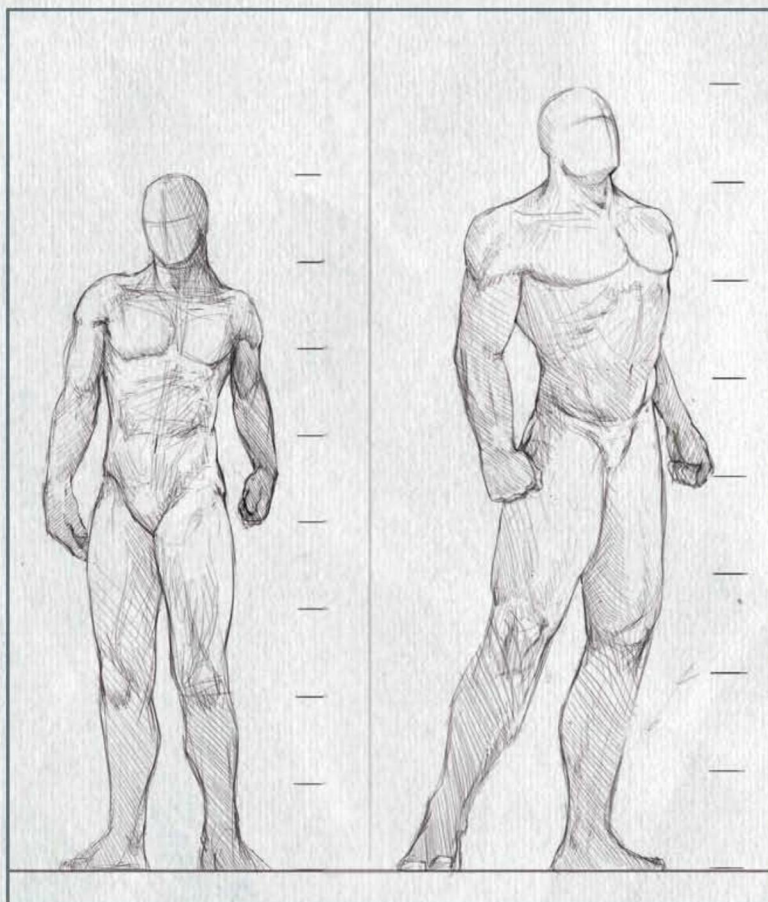
And those are the main elements that should be used to draw a superhero and make it expressive. Of course, you must not forget the gestures and body language that help make any character convincingly alive. To observe and study these superhero features, have a look at the classic American comics, pictures on the internet and the many movies dedicated to them.

THE CIVILIAN

The body of this regular character is slender, clumsy and shorter, to distinguish him easily from the superhero. His back is curved as a sign of submission.

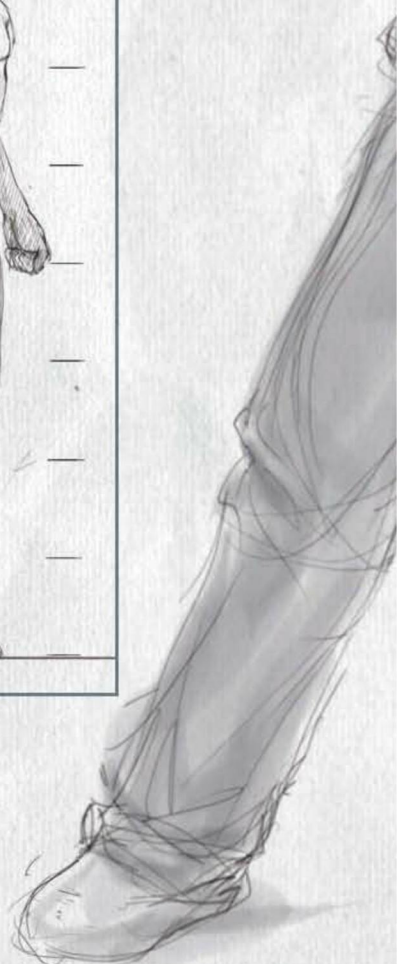
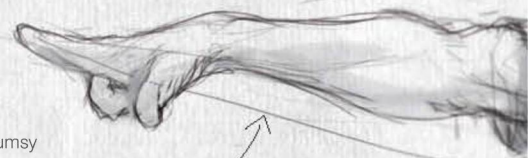
PLEA FOR HELP

The normal character asks the superhero for help. His face is visibly upset and his hand indicates the direction from which the danger is coming.



Make a figure look heroic

Body language is very important and you'll need a good understanding of human anatomy and proportions to make your characters look vital and credible. The ideal ratio of the heroic figure is proportional to the whole body measures, taking the head as a unit. For example the head of a superhero is one eighth of his height. Compared to normal human proportions, superheroes are taller, have more developed muscles and longer legs. Together with a correct representation of the anatomy, you must transmit a clear sense of your superhero's gestures, and these can be conveyed using rapid strokes that will also give rhythm to the drawing.



Fantasy Art Skills

HERO FACE

The look is serious, concentrated and completely focused on the point indicated by the citizen to examine the nature of the threat.

Body

The muscular structure is highly developed and so well defined you can see it through his costume. He's evidently taller than an ordinary person.

POSE

The pose of the superhero is graceful but also tense, to underline his state of alert in response to the call for help.

Different stances for comics action

Learn about the different poses superheroes can take in action scenes

These basic poses can be included in an action scene to show your heroes' fighting prowess against their enemies.

These six sketches represent a superhero performing a simple action. These are: standing firm, as if resisting an enemy; throwing a weapon; flying fast; flying and fighting (combat in the air); lifting something heavy; and finally, with his arm up, proudly accepting praise.

These sketches are scantily defined and have few details, for example the face or clothing, but were designed focusing on body language to give greater expression to the pose.

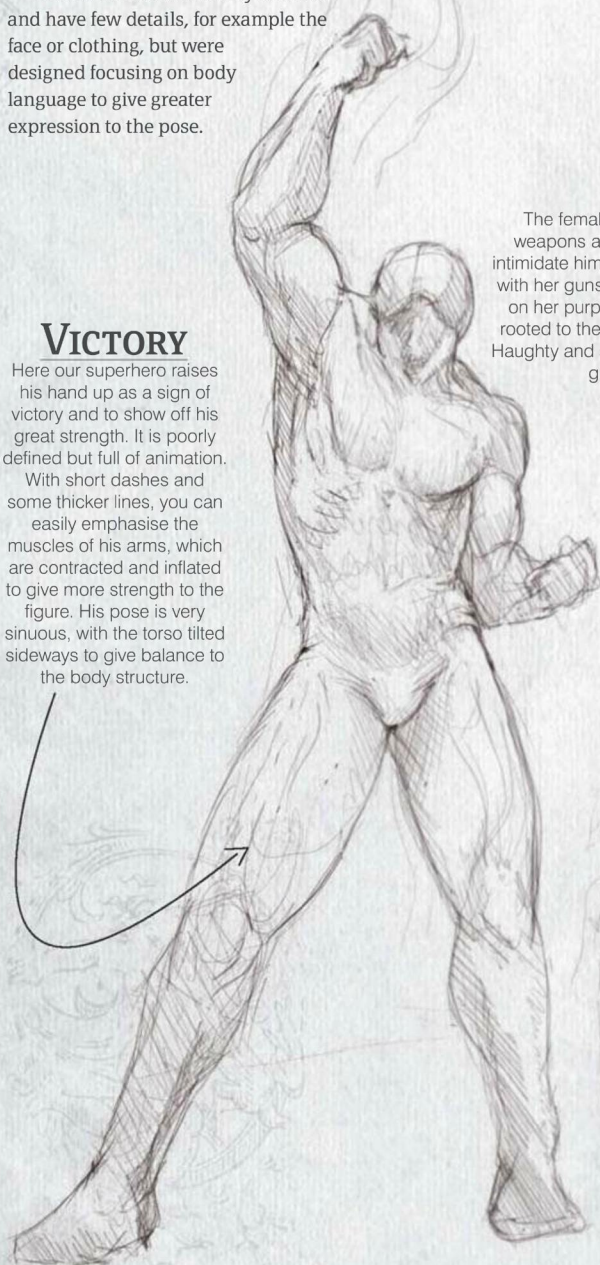
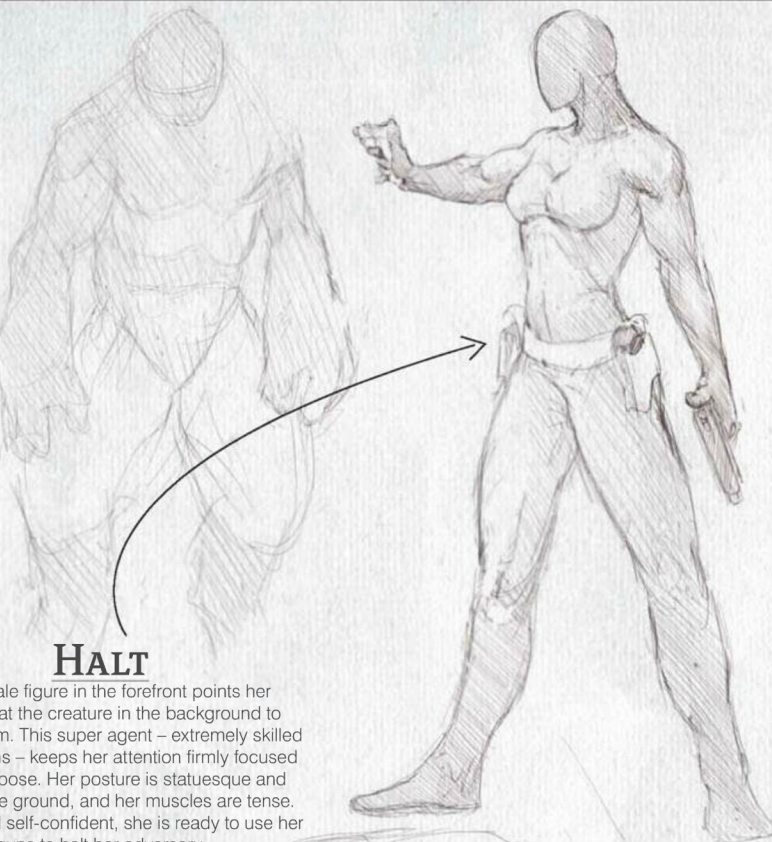
VICTORY

Here our superhero raises his hand up as a sign of victory and to show off his great strength. It is poorly defined but full of animation.

With short dashes and some thicker lines, you can easily emphasise the muscles of his arms, which are contracted and inflated to give more strength to the figure. His pose is very sinuous, with the torso tilted sideways to give balance to the body structure.

HALT

The female figure in the forefront points her weapons at the creature in the background to intimidate him. This super agent – extremely skilled with her guns – keeps her attention firmly focused on her purpose. Her posture is statuesque and rooted to the ground, and her muscles are tense. Haughty and self-confident, she is ready to use her guns to halt her adversary.



Fantasy Art Skills

“ These basic poses can be included in an action scene to show your heroes’ fighting prowess ”

FLYING PUNCH

This pose is slightly more difficult to draw because to strike with a fist would normally require the superhero's feet to be firmly anchored to the ground. In this case, the action takes place in the air and the force of the punch is given mainly by the speed of the superhero rushing against his opponent. The faster the momentum, the stronger his attack will be.

TO THE RESCUE

To give an idea of the strength of this female superhero, I drew her in the act of lifting a car. Her strength is enough to lift the machine with just one hand while with the other she tries to catch the person in trouble. Her left bicep is contracted and swollen from the effort while the right arm is stretched out to reach the poor victim who unfortunately ended up inside a manhole.

WHERE'S THE EXIT?

In this sketch our female superhero is flying away as fast as possible from a violent explosion. The lines of movement give the idea of high speed, making her feet and coat elongated. The structure of the body is very slender too and therefore more aerodynamic.

ATTACK WITH NUNCHAKU

Here I have drawn a character who uses the nunchaku as his weapon. He's launching it against his adversary using his full force. Notice the muscles of the legs that anchor themselves firmly on the ground. The trunk in torsion shows the effort required to launch the weapon with his right hand, while a few lines going from the bottom upwards underline the hand's movement. The nunchaku is pushed towards the outer side of the image.

Evolution of an image

Start with a 3D model to create amazing sci-fi environments

Titus Lunter

Artist info



www.u2644.com

Software used Photoshop

I'm a Dutch concept artist who's been in the industry for two years now. I've had the pleasure of working for and with a lot of talented individuals who have taught me a great deal. My main focus in art is conveying emotion through landscapes and evoking a strong atmosphere in my pieces.

01



02



03



04



About Edge of the Earth

This image started as a vague idea in my head. I knew I wanted to paint a crashed ship but was not sure how the image would evolve. The way I set it up was as a speedpainting, allowing for a lot of happy accidents by just taking ideas as they came and developing in many different directions all at once. The idea of a flat earth with the sea pouring over the edge always intrigued me from a painting point of view (as it was imagined in medieval maps of the world and in a lot of fantasy work). Mix in a little exploration and you are good to go!

01

This shows the super quick box model I did for this image. Sometimes when working with complex shapes (in this case the bow of the ship) it helps setting it up in 3D so you get the perspective right. You can use trial or student versions of Maya, or use Google SketchUp. It won't take you half as long as sketching using grids and guides might.

05



06



02

First I picked a nice blue colour palette, keeping a reference of the key tones on a separate document. Then, working as quickly as I could, I blocked in shapes to give a rough idea of depth – what is in the foreground and what isn't. Atmosphere was really important so I put that in first. I wasn't too worried about how clean things looked just yet.

03

After I felt I had reached the stage of a reasonably balanced composition, it was time to explore other elements. I was trying to emphasise the ship and its crash to give the image more of a sense of movement. Rendering the image so it is polished isn't too important at this stage, but keeping it rough and playing around with texture, shapes and lines is!

04

A bit of exploration and trial and error later, and out popped a base image I could work with. Don't be afraid to paint stuff in and take it out again. Flip the image and experiment with different techniques. Try random brushes, strange tools and weird filters. See if it does anything – if not then you know what to avoid. Remember, it's about the happy accidents.

05

Colour correction is the most infamous stage in any painting. This is where I go mental with colours, which I usually don't keep. Trial and error, remember?! I try different textures and colour balance layers with all sorts of blending modes. Keep in mind that each colour has certain emotions attached to it and each colour has its own strength.

06

Finalising the image is the fun part and also the most time-consuming of the stages. You can go all out with rendering and light balancing, so you can spend almost an infinite amount of time on it. From this to the final image was about the last five per cent of the image but it took me just as long to finish as it did to do the all of the previous steps combined.



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Complete the colour

Set your palette of hues and enhance contrast

14 Colourful character To unite the figure of the magical adversary, choose a common colour such as green. Build the palette up with shadows, highlights and a little bit of blue tinting all with this hue. This element wasn't a part of the original sketch but enhances the image.



15 Hard edges Add sharp highlights to the hot metal of the flaming car. To do this, you can use a hard-edged brush instead of the soft variants you used to create the flames. A hard-edged brush is best for high-gloss materials in the scene and you can add strong drop shadows to suggest a bright light source. All of these elements add to the dynamism of the piece.



17 Tonal depth To bring in more details to the scene, use a cool colour scheme for items in the far distance because cool colours recede, while warmer ones leap forward.



19 Add special effects On a layer set to the Screen blend mode you can create some special effects to enhance the scene. Paint on glows and volumetric lighting, and you can also add some atmospheric depth to the background with further Screen layers set at a lower opacity.



18 Atmosphere Add a layer above everything, naming it Paint, and then use the same techniques with the Lasso tool for the flames. Grab your Splatter brush for the water that is flooding the street from the hydrants. It's all about adding some drama and atmosphere to the scene.



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20 Flatten and finish Step back and look at the final piece, tweaking where you need to. As an optional step, you can further flatten the image by applying the 'Layer' menu item.



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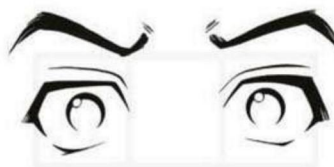
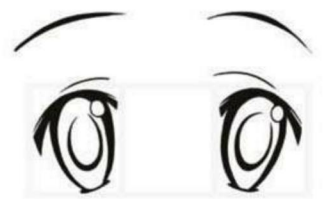
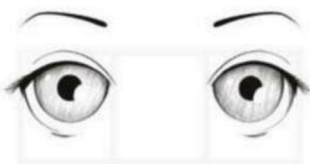
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The art of Japanese comics known as manga has been incredibly popular not only in Japan but all across the globe for quite some time now. It's important to understand that in Japan comics aren't just popular among children – everyone reads comics. As a result, there is a vast selection of content available ranging from children's stories all the way up to mature comics targeting adults. Many talented artists not only passionately follow the manga style, but also use it as a basis for their own styles. If you are new to drawing in this way, deciding on where to start can often be a bit overwhelming. Let's jump right in and focus on drawing the heads and facial features to get these crucial elements right.

When looking at the head of any manga character, we can quickly discern that the most obvious feature is almost always the eyes. In this comic style, the eyes are often drawn very differently than in other mediums. Not every feature is represented while some are almost always there in some form or

When adding colour to a character's hair, it is common in manga to create strong specular highlights that conform to the overall shape in a blocky fashion.



fashion. Manga eyes are also almost always drawn oversized and in a very expressive manner.

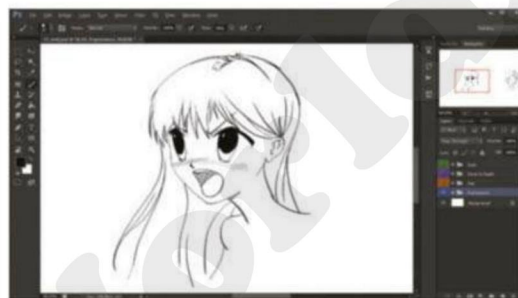
Before you begin drawing the eyes, know that certain features are always represented regardless of the stylistic interpretation. These features include the eyelash line, eyelid line, eyebrow, iris, pupil and at least one prominent highlight on the iris. While stylistic interpretation may add more detail, regardless of their shape or size, these details will associate your work with the style. One interesting

note is that the thickness of the eyelash line can be used to communicate a character's gender.

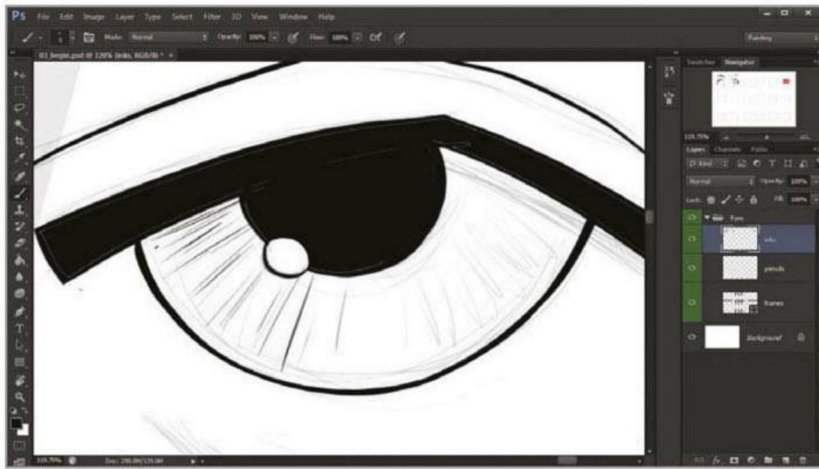
Now that we understand what to look for when drawing manga eyes, let's discuss drawing the head. A manga head, simplified, is nothing more than a circle with a cone attached to make the jaw and chin. The circle can



Manga eyes can take on many different stylistic shapes, but they almost always have the same landmark features.



When drawing expressions for manga characters, several hatched lines across the face can indicate blushing or anger.



When drawing manga, there are typically two phases. The sketching phase is quick and loose, while the inking phase focuses on cleanliness and refinement.



be divided in order to place the various features of the face. The distance between the circle and the tip of the cone (the chin) can be increased based on the age of the character. Older characters typically have longer faces and the location of the features will also change slightly. Features other than the eyes are typically minimal in terms of detail. For a more step-by-step approach to drawing a manga head and positioning its features, make sure you check out this article's accompanying tutorial video.

The quickest and easiest way to communicate the gender of a character based solely on their head is through their hairstyle. Because of this, nailing the hair is an important part of manga character design. You should study hairstyles that are common for the age and ethnicity of the character you are drawing. Some important things to consider when drawing hairstyles are where the character's hairline and parting are located. The parting is important because it will allow you to establish the directional flow of the hair. Once this has been determined, you can begin building up the body of the hairstyle. When drawing hair, it is best to work up a sketch first and then, when inking the sketch, use it for the hairstyle's silhouette. All that is left is to do then is to detail the edges using some lines to indicate the

A female's hair can be used to make a pose more dynamic, adding both energy and movement.



A manga head is basically a circle with a cone attached for the chin. The circle can be divided to place features.



The location of the parting should be determined first. Add the rest of the hair based on the direction of the flow.

clumping of the hair. Hairstyles can be a lot of fun to draw and can be used to bring an extraordinary amount of energy to a posed female, for example.

Once you have got the hang of drawing manga heads with hair from various views, you can take the next logical step. In our experience, this is transforming the features you already know how to draw in order to convey a specific expression. While there is no magical formula we can give you to help with this, we would advise studying the features that are consistently drawn on manga characters and watching how they change based on an expression or emotion. Use a mirror to make those expressions yourself and then supplement that with images you find online of others making that expression. Identify consistencies and try implementing and exaggerating them in your manga characters.

While drawing in a manga style may look simple at first, as with anything, truly mastering it and making it your own will take time. Our advice to you is to be passionate about what you draw. If you are having fun, it will show in your work. And with that said, get drawing! We look forward to seeing the fantastic manga characters that you create.

Hairstyles can be a lot of fun to draw and can be used to bring an extraordinary amount of energy to a posed female

No Disc. No Problem

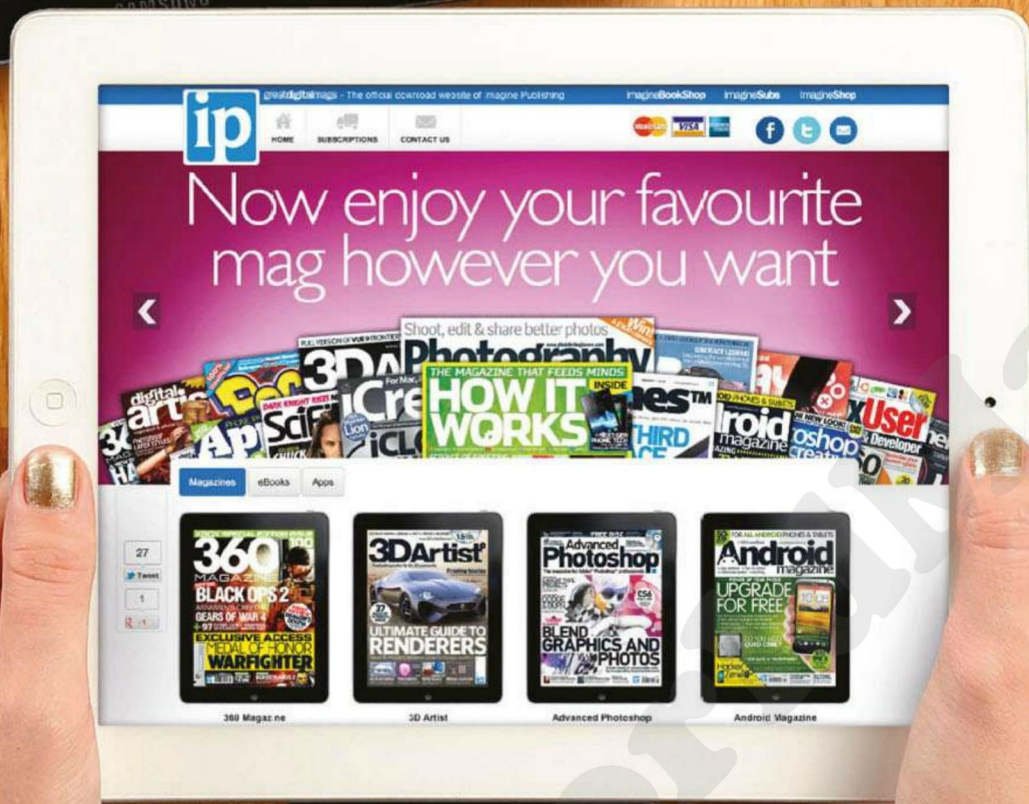
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